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LANGUAGE MENTALITY IN EDUCATIONAL TEXTS

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Abstract

This paper analyzes English educational texts of school student books for Russian pupils (grades 7 and 8) studying English as a second language. The subject is relevant for the importance of national peculiarities of communicants and necessity for their study which promotes successful intercultural dialogue. The present study investigates educational texts classification, their notions and characteristics, levels of language mentality and linguistic world view of Russian schoolchildren in discourses of the most popular English textbooks in Russia. The research covers the following levels of language mentality, i.e. verbal and semantic, language and cognitive, axiological, motivation and pragmatic ones. For the first time, educational texts of the English language textbooks are classified according to language mentality formation. The national linguistic picture of the world, and therefore the linguistic mentality, are the result of the collective consciousness reflecting the ethnic group of the external world in the process of its hysterical development and cognition of the surrounding reality. As a result of the interaction of the external world and human consciousness, a linguistic picture of the world of the national language arises. The given examples of language mentality through the lens of the textbooks' authors allow thorough studying the process and means of developing the image of English-speaking people.

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Keywords: Discourse, educational texts, language mentality, second language, teaching, textbooks.



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1. Introduction

Educational texts contain both general information about life, traditions, habits and other features of certain countries which are an integral part of their linguistic mentality, as well as specific, interesting and new facts that affect the formation of language world view of the students. Creating a textbook, the authors reflect their vision of the country and culture, use certain stylistic means, simplified language constructions. This leaves a definite imprint on all texts and their perception by students.

This study is of particular relevance in connection with interdisciplinary approaches in modern researches. Nowadays it becomes important not only to select texts for students, but also to evaluate the impact they can have on personality, consciousness and development of a child. Lei et al. identified a total of 165 most frequently discussed research topics in applied linguistics (42 journals) and found out that the most popular topic in publications published since 2005 (2005–16) was about psychology of the language learner (Lei & Liu, 2019). Some linguists note the great importance of sociocultural theory of mind for second language researchers and educators (Compernolle & van, Williams, 2013; Schmidt, 1990). Modern researches discuss the importance of psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology for the second language learning and teaching practices (Randall, 2007). According to González-Lloret (2019), “some subareas have become the focus of study, often influenced by advances and research in applied linguistics, while others remain to be explored further; among these is the area of technology-mediated second / foreign language pragmatics” (p. 113). Chun (2011) illustrates how “culture is embedded in language as discourse” (as cited in González-Lloret, 2019, p. 395).

All these spheres are closely connected with the notion of linguistic mentality which is “a national-specific way of a sign representation of knowledge about the world, a system of values and behaviours embodied in the semantic system of the national language” (Radbil, 2010, p. 6). Different languages impose their own specific picture of the world, a significant component of which is originality and imaginative resources, primarily of a metaphoric character (Petrova, 2018). That is why it is important to research levels of the linguistic mentality of Russian-speaking schoolchildren formed by English textbooks. The relevance of this topic is explained by the importance of national characteristics in intercultural communication, as well as the need to study them for a successful dialogue of cultures.

2. Problem Statement

The linguistic picture of the world represents a subjective image of reality that develops in an individual under the influence of various factors. The linguistic picture of the world is specific, it reflects a special, culturally significant way of perceiving the world in a particular language. This perception is manifested in nationally specific key ideas, stereotypes, etc. In turn, the perception of the world is caused by such a phenomenon as linguistic mentality. Some levels of linguistic mentality are distinguished: verbal-semantic, linguo-cognitive, motivational-pragmatic (Karaulov, 2007).

The verbal-semantic level characterizes the degree of knowledge of general language semantics, knowledge of the meanings of lexical units and the rules for their compatibility. This level functions in the vocabulary of a linguistic personality and reflects an integral stock of general knowledge that is characteristic of all native speakers of a given language: this includes nationally-specific meanings

embodied in the lexical, word-formation, and grammatical semantic features of this language. The verbal-semantic level is considered to be zero, since it does not individualize the linguistic picture of the world.

At the linguo-cognitive level, features of individual perception of the world and value orientation are manifested. This level is the “substantial level” of the linguistic mentality, which is realized in the thesaurus of the personality, i.e. in the concepts, stereotypes expressed by stable keywords, expressions, cliches, associations, etc. This includes ideas about time and space, man and nature, social activities, etc.

Representations of values are an integral part of the linguistic mentality. They are embodied in it in many ways. Values can be part of the core semantics of keywords, which can be called national cultural concepts. In addition, they can be explicated through stylistic, evaluative, emotionally expressive shades of word meaning.

Motivation and pragmatic level is associated with motivation, attitudes, and goals of human activity. It is implemented in a special network of communicative needs related to taste preferences, behaviour, texts used, emotional and evaluative connotations, communication style, stereotypes, etc. The motivation-and-pragmatic level is a source of linguistic activity of the personality, as it embodies its spiritual world. The system of life attitudes is realized through intonation, idiomatic expressions, modal words, and metatext units.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1.** What are popular types of educational texts in Russian textbooks for English learners?
- 3.2.** What verbal means are used by the authors of various English textbooks to form the linguistic mentality of Russian-speaking students?
- 3.3.** How are verbal-semantic, linguo-cognitive, motivational-pragmatic levels of students' linguistic mentality formed?
- 3.4.** Is there a negative impact of educational texts on linguistic mentality?

4. Purpose of the Study

In this article an impact of English textbooks discourses on verbal-semantic, linguo-cognitive, motivational-pragmatic levels of linguistic mentality of Russian-speaking students of the seventh and the eighth grades are analysed.

5. Research Methods

For achievement of the research goal, the following methods are used – the linguacultural approach, continuous and random sampling; method of component and contextual analysis; classification method. The materials for the study are ten English textbooks for Russian students (grades 7 and 8) studying English as a second language. All books are issued in Russia from 2006 to 2016.

6. Findings

6.1. The distribution of text types in student books

Babaylova (1987) defines the educational text as “a text organized in a meaningful, linguistic and compositional relationship into a single system, on the basis of which a knowledge system is given for a particular discipline, skills and abilities are instilled” (p. 130).

After analyzing the structure of educational texts, we identified the following functions of their information content, integrity, connectedness and semantic completeness; They perform an important social function, i.e. are a means of transferring accumulated knowledge to a new generation; appear as a result of processing primary texts, and therefore contain information that is secondary in terms of scientific value; often have a simplified structure, grammatical and lexical occupancy, as the authors adapt them to the level of perception of recipients, namely adolescents; they are a repository of cultural codes, general and professional knowledge, affect the consciousness of students.

Taking into account the intention of the educational texts, the following subtypes can be distinguished: 1) country-study texts; 2) informative texts; 3) literary texts; 4) patriotic texts; 5) humorous texts; 6) dialogical texts; 7) letters (see Table 01).

Table 01. Distribution of text types in Russian student books

Textbook s	Monologues					Dialogue s	Letter s	Total
	country -study	informativ e	literar y	patrioti c	humorou s			
1. Grade 7	10	10	2	1	4	9	6	42
2. Grade 7	8	25	0	6	0	8	6	53
3. Grade 7	7	9	11	2	1	5	2	37
4. Grade 7	16	12	3	9	10	13	7	70
5. Grade 7	17	8	0	9	0	8	5	47
6. Grade 8	10	16	5	5	1	5	3	45
7. Grade 8	14	25	0	3	0	9	6	57
8. Grade 8	6	12	10	1	0	7	0	36
9. Grade 8	11	18	0	10	9	4	8	60
10. Grade 8	8	17	3	3	0	4	2	38

The Table 01 demonstrates that according to their dominant function country-study texts and informative texts prevail in textbooks for Russian students studying English as a second language. This information is quite important, as it allows us to conclude what aspects of foreign language culture the authors prefer and with what phenomena schoolchildren are introduced to in the first place.

6.2. The verbal-semantic level of linguistic mentality

When analyzing English textbooks, it is easy to notice that they are saturated with lexical units designed to decorate the text, emphasize the significance of certain realities, and influence readers' perception of information. For example, descriptions of national parks in the UK and the United States

abound in superlatives *the most popular, one of the most interesting places, the largest national park.* Introducing schoolchildren with famous writers and heroes of their works, actors and celebrities, the authors emphasize their importance for the culture of native English speakers: Agatha Christie is the “Queen of Crime”, the world’s best known mystery writer; Sherlock Holmes is *the most brilliant detective ever, extremely intelligent.*

Particular attention should be paid to how the English language is positioned for students: *English is the most popular language in the world. It has become the language of the planet, the first truly global language.* Thanks to these stylistic techniques, a positive effect and motivation for learning English is created.

In addition to the principles mentioned above, there is also the principle of “keywords”, which connects lexical composition of the language and culture. The most illuminated value orientations of English-speaking peoples in English textbooks are independence, tolerance and equality in their various manifestations. It is important to note that only one text book introduces the concept of political correctness. This is an undoubted advantage of this textbook, since in the rest such comments were not found.

6.3. The linguo-cognitive level of linguistic mentality

English textbooks describe people from different cultures in different ways. The British are considered not only purposeful and hardworking, but also educated: *The British are believed to be the greatest newspaper readers in the world.* The authors emphasize that the British always read newspapers and magazines to the end, unlike other nations. This way of expressing thoughts allows to adequately perceive information and performs an imperative and cognitive function, transferring new knowledge to students and encouraging them to work harder to achieve goals.

Such a feature of the British mentality as conservatism can be seen in many textbooks. Their isolation, the value of personal space and privacy are repeatedly emphasized: *The British like their privacy, so not all topics are safe for small talk.* The given examples form a bit negative image of the British: they are not ready for change, very restrained, it is not easy to make contact. This feature of their linguistic mentality in the texts under analyses is the exact opposite of the mentality of the Russian people, always ready for new acquaintances, hospitable and open. Students have an internal conflict; the assimilation of a foreign culture becomes difficult. When studying English-language culture, students are faced with different prejudices against the British: *Whenever the English comeback from abroad they always say what a lovely time they have had and how friendly everyone was. That’s because they don’t expect people to be friendly, because they aren’t friendly to outsiders.* Such examples lead to the consolidation of these prejudices in adolescents, who are particularly susceptible to outside influences.

Some authors try to create a positive image of the UK, the USA and their inhabitants, so that a Russian-speaking student has a desire to communicate with them, to travel to the country of the language being studied. To achieve these goals, proposals in which the main characters are British are usually designed to demonstrate their positive character traits and form a good attitude towards them: *John has deep knowledge. He is a well-educated man. Charles turned out to be a very good friend; he was really very helpful when I was in trouble. The USA is one of the biggest and richest countries in the world!* It is repeatedly emphasized that the Americans are accustomed to achieve everything independently: like the

people of Great Britain, they are very purposeful, ready to work hard to achieve success: *Americans are considered to be the most patriotic people in the world.*

The image of the inhabitants of Russia is also quite interesting, only words with a positive connotation are used, whole sections and paragraphs are given to the formation of a positive attitude: *Russia is rich in really gifted people.* Often the description of the Russian character is carried out through the prism of the nature of Russia: *Many romantic ideas are connected with this place: a land of natural beauty, of hard winters, and of real Russian people – strong, honest and hardworking.*

Thus, the images of the peoples of the three countries – Great Britain, the USA and Russia – are very different from each other. On the one hand, there is an adequate assessment of specific features of the mentality, such as the value of personal space, tolerance and hospitality, and on the other hand, in some cases, the authors neglect the foreign culture, which complicates the perception and assimilation of this culture by schoolchildren, and therefore leads to incorrect or incomplete formation of a linguistic picture of the world.

6.4. Value system in the linguistic mentality (axiological level)

The most important cultural dominants are idiomatic expressions, proverbs and sayings. There is a profound difference in the Russian and English language mentality. The concepts underlying stable expressions vary widely. For example, the English proverb *better safe than sorry* suggests that by taking certain measures, people themselves will be able to protect themselves from negative incidents, i.e. it all depends entirely on them. This is one of the features of the linguistic mentality of the English-speaking people - independence, faith in oneself. If we compare this proverb with its Russian equivalent (God saves a protected one), you can see that the Russians rely not only on themselves, but also on God. The meaning of the proverb lies in the popular consciousness of people, of which religion is an integral part. The difference in idiomatic expressions is just as strong. Studying idioms and proverbs schoolchildren can more closely get acquainted with the inner world of English-speaking culture, a system of values and attitudes that can be either similar or different from their own.

A clear reflection of the linguistic mentality of the people is a sense of humour, which in English textbooks is expressed in jokes. Not all textbooks pay due attention to this branch of knowledge, although it is quite important. British humour is considered particularly subtle and non-standard. In British jokes, sarcasm and satire prevail over everyday life:

– *What did you get for your birthday? – Another year.*

Humour creates a positive attitude among schoolchildren, contributes to the formation of a positive image of a new culture and contributes to its adequate perception, increases motivation and develops speech activity of schoolchildren.

6.5. Life attitudes and behavioural stereotypes in the linguistic mentality (motivation-and-pragmatic level)

This aspect is reflected in description of traditions and holidays. In most cases, the authors introduce schoolchildren to holidays such as New Year, Christmas and Easter, that is, holidays that unite the countries. The authors of some textbooks are not limited to all known holidays. For example, schoolchildren are get

acquainted with such phenomena as Hogmanay, Notting Hill Carnival, St. David's Day, Highlanders Games, Guy Fawkes Night, etc. In addition, the traditions of Great Britain are mentioned: a ceremony during which the banner is carried in front of the formation (Trooping the Colour), an inventory of swans (Swan Upping), the opening ceremony of the parliament, the singing of Christmas carols, etc.

Semiotic, i.e. iconic behaviour is very important. It is always conditioned by something and has a definite purpose. It is known that different nations behave differently in certain situations of social communication. The authors of many textbooks introduce schoolchildren to such national-specific behaviour: *Americans greet their friends as many times as they meet them during the day. Americans don't take off their shoes as soon as they enter someone's home.* This behaviour may seem strange to a Russian-speaking student, because in Russia a different model is adopted.

Another interesting topic is education. It is no coincidence that such a diversity of cultures exists in the world: people live in different environments and are brought up on different principles. Most often, these principles coincide, and in this case, students form a positive attitude towards a different culture: they recognize the similarities between their own and foreign people, they perceive the proposed information more adequately.

7. Conclusion

Linguistic mentality is a phenomenon of ethnic consciousness, which undergoes certain changes, but remains unchanged. Such stability is ensured by the national language, which is the basis of the linguistic mentality: on the one hand, the language ensures the transfer of experience from generation to generation without significant losses, and on the other, it allows adaptation to continuously changing environmental conditions.

Thus, often when learning English, there is a clash of two cultures: which is familiar in one is unacceptable in the other. Without appropriate assistance, such a difference in mentality can significantly reduce the motivation to learn a language and have a negative impact on the perception of the people and culture as a whole. However, the research showed that, in general, English textbooks form a positive image of the culture and mentality of the English-speaking and Russian-speaking people. The authors of the analysed textbooks try to avoid those that may cause misunderstanding or discontent among schoolchildren, use positive vocabulary in describing someone else's culture and mentality, and try to create a positive attitude towards learning English. The most important purpose of the educational text is to store information, cultural codes, to be a carrier of general and professional knowledge, to influence the consciousness and motivation of students.

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