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### Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding

## LANGUAGE DIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT AS A PHENOMENON OF EUROPEAN SECURITY

Elena A. Alekseeva (a)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) French Filology Department, Voronezh State University, 394018, 1 Universitetskaya ploshschad',  
elena.alekseeva14@yandex.ru

### *Abstract*

The article considers the phenomenon of linguistic security threats resulting from “technical” English dominating all spheres of life of the European community, which leads to a decreasing role of European languages and, eventually, the loss of cultural, historical and mental identity of the national language. The article aims at describing the strategy for promoting learning European languages (using the example of French) in one of the regions of Russia with a view to contributing to multilingualism, identity preservation and eradicating cultural dominance in terms of European security. The research focuses on the following aspects. Firstly, it describes negative consequences of the “technical” English promotion, such as the risk of communicating distorted information due to the lack of language proficiency, or mutual misunderstanding due to the lack of any cultural background of the “technical” English. Secondly, the paper analyzes the EU language policy, which highlights the efforts to protect linguistic diversity in a number of documents, but, on the other hand, allows English to prevail socially and academically at the expense of European languages. Thirdly, the article presents the regional strategy of promoting learning French, developed by the author at Voronezh state University. The strategy is based on the University’s experience of participating in Erasmus+ international cooperation projects. The paper describes the stages of the proposed strategy, participants, partners, and the project deliverables. The strategy is believed to contribute both to increasing motivation to learn French and improvement in intercultural communication.

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**Keywords:** Language diversity, language security, loss of identity.



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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays the study of security issues is one of the most relevant topics due to the increasing turbulence in the world, which leads to reconsidering or some shifts in international relationships. Numerous studies on security issues prove that security is a complex phenomenon characterized by diversity and multilevel and multi-vector manifestations (“Regional’nyj strategii”, 2019). It is connected directly to such concepts as risks, threats leading to confrontation, potential conflicts which are intently discussed by political experts due to “the urgent need to interpret the current socio-political processes, predict the way of emerging conflicts, the timely use of political and other technologies to regulate them and minimize negative consequences” (Glukhova & Timofeeva, 2016, p. 15).

## 2. Problem Statement

The researchers describe various types of threats that can destabilize the functioning of the global, including European, community (Entin, 2019). We think it is important to study one of the types of threats to the security of modern society, which could be called linguistic or intercultural. It has not been the subject of extensive discussions yet. There is evidence to suggest, its essence is that the processes of globalization and the increased Anglo-Saxon influence on the European continent have led to the aggressive dominance of the English language in international communication. At the same time, the usage and, as a result, the study of other European languages in educational institutions all over European countries and Russia is decreasing rapidly. It should be noted that we dwell on the languages of the largest countries in Europe – France and Germany, which, firstly, made an enormous contribution to European and world culture, to the history of Europe; secondly, these countries were behind the creation of the European Union; thirdly, they are the leaders of the EU defining largely its current state and prospects of development (Alexeeva, 2019).

In the context of the current global confrontation of various forces in order to establish their own rules of the world order, the issue of language policy of States is beyond the responsibility of national education departments who are in charge of designing curricula for secondary schools or universities. It is becoming a political issue that determines the mental configuration of the society, especially the younger generation. It happens due to the fact that the role of language is forming the identity and ensuring existence of any nation. A language represents the European identity as coming “from the heart”, but not from the mind (Fukuyama, 2007). A language is an essential, nuclear identification feature of a person, which is the foundation to build on other identification parameters such as traditions, historical consciousness, values, rules of behaviour, reactions to events and their assessment. Each language represents a centuries-old culture, thus, fluency in the particular language equals understanding of the nation's mentality.

## 3. Research Questions

In this regard, knowledge of foreign languages and cultures is the primary basis for mutual understanding, which is necessary in the intercultural communication. The latter is viewed as the interaction of representatives of different cultures in order to maintain an effective international dialogue. The condition for mutual understanding and successful communication is the usage of native languages by partners in intercultural dialogue (either directly, if both communicants speak each other's language, or

using high-quality professional translation). In this case, interlocutors perceive not just words but see the deep meaning behind them, understand and distinguish either hidden or explicit intentions of the speaker, implicit information, subtexts, expectations, and can anticipate and figure out the communicant's reaction to the discussed problems or actions. Thus, the urgent issue on the current agenda is the need to promote the study of national languages both in Europe and in Russia.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to develop the strategy of encouraging the study of European languages in Russia at the regional level. This article aims at describing a regional strategy of supporting the study of European languages (using the example of French) in the Voronezh region, developed at the Voronezh State University. To achieve this goal, the article addresses the following issues: to analyze the negative consequences of the widespread usage and learning of English for successful intercultural dialogues; to study the EU language policy; to describe the strategy of promoting French language learning in the Voronezh region.

#### **5. Research Methods**

In this section of the article, we will focus on the study of the impact of the usage of "technical" English on the implementation of intercultural dialogue. Also, we will consider the attitude of the European Union to foreign languages studies and describe the Strategy proposed "To learn the languages of the EU countries – to understand each other better", focusing on the mechanisms for attracting attention to the study of European languages in the regions of Russia (for example, French in the Voronezh region).

##### **Influence of "technical" English on intercultural dialogue**

In the modern world, the English language is a heterogeneous phenomenon: we can distinguish at least three forms of its functioning. Firstly, it is the classic English language of Great Britain, which is a code to the great cultural heritage. Secondly, there are a number of countries in which English, not being the native language, has been used for decades as the national or official language of communication. But even in relation to the varieties of English in the United Kingdom and the United States, the researchers note serious linguistic and cultural differences as well as stereotypes being a barrier to successful intercultural communication, mismatched world views, and different value priorities (Abramova, 2016). The third aspect of using English is its functioning as a "technical" language, which is a simplified version of conventional English and appears a certain threat to successful intercultural communication for the following reasons.

##### **1. The risk of receiving misleading, inaccurate information.**

"Technical" English is often used for communication between representatives of nations for whom it is not native. Since not everyone is fluent in a foreign language, most people cannot express themselves clearly and accurately, their language is schematic and straightforward. As a result of lacking command of the language, there is a risk both to transmit and receive distorted information.

**2. Violation of mutual understanding in the sphere of international relationships.** In this case, we speak about the English language, called "Brusselish", "Globish", which is used for communication in the

institutions of the European Union. This English language doesn't include any particular culture, knowledge of its linguistic rules does not require any cultural background, understanding the mentality of communicants who belong to different cultures. Due to this factor a person who does not possess the necessary cognitive fund, risk violating the psycho-cultural codes of the one he/she speaks to. They are not always able to predict other people's reactions to their statements disregarding their national and cultural characteristics. It creates the prerequisites for a possible "breakdown" in communication as well as different interpretations of the same phenomena, or even conflicts may appear.

There is no denying that the spread of "technical" English gives certain ease, convenience for communication in a number of areas of everyday life, enables to get "emergency" help on a trip, to understand ads, instructions, all sorts of brief and simple information at the household level or within the framework of narrow professional communication. But the deliberate and voluntary usage and imposition of English at the expense of national languages, which is observed today in various European institutions, results in serious consequences, affecting the foundations of national identity (Alekseeva, 2019, p.241)

Here are some cases of unjustified use of the English language. For example, in France, a lot of organizations require employees to use English at work when communicating with each other. It comes to the point that "the French who try to use their native language in their work are accused of linguistic chauvinism" ("Franczuzy' otzhimayut...", 2019). The Russian students participating in a survey on their motivation to join academic mobility programs in countries such as Hungary, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany admit that it is "the opportunity to practise English" (Deriglazova & Grosheva, 2017, p. 137). These examples show that people, including young people, do not understand the connection between the language and the nation, the country, or culture. They do not understand that each country speaks its own language, not English and that you need to learn the languages and mentality of the inhabitants of these countries.

The downside of this situation is the looming loss of national and regional identity, self-identification with the nation, country, region, culture and traditions. As a result, the landmarks of cross-cultural communication are blurred, as communicants lose their sense of belonging to cultures.

### ***Features of the EU language policy***

Even at the stage of planning the construction of a united Europe and understanding the principles of European Union integration, the researchers claim that in the course of integration processes, it is necessary to guarantee conditions for maintaining a balance among the citizens of European countries between a sense of belonging to their native country and involvement in the European community (Bossuat, 1997; Gerbet, 1999). The language factor is the most sensitive and indicative in maintaining this balance. The EU's urge to take this factor into account can be seen in its language policy. Thus, Article 22 of the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union States point out that linguistic diversity is one of the primary characteristics of the European cultural heritage, the cornerstone of democracy and culture within the European Union. The importance of languages for social, economic and political integration is emphasized in the special resolution on linguistic diversity (February 14, 2002). Official languages are the official languages of all countries of the European Union, which form the basis of European heritage and culture. Thus, the Maastricht Treaty "proclaimed official respect for the cultural and linguistic diversity of the European continent" (Piskunova, 2017, p. 171; Traité sur l'Union européenne, 1992).

The European Union is especially focused on preserving regional and minority languages by holding events to support them, including conferences, cultural events, and networking (Ministry of culture of the Russian Federation [www.rus-eu-culture.ru](http://www.rus-eu-culture.ru)). For example, the residents of the French city of Lille, guarding the identity of their local culture, show interest in the regional dialect CH'ti, take measures to preserve it. Lille hosts a series of events to show the importance of CH'ti: they publish books about CH'ti, words in CH'ti are entered into explanatory dictionaries of the French language, there is CH'tribu Association established, and the festival dedicated to The CH'ti dialect is held ([www.lille2004.com](http://www.lille2004.com)), (Lille, 2004; Nekhayeva, 2020).

Since 2001 September, 26 sees the annual European day of languages declared by the Council of Europe and supported by the European Union with the aim of promoting linguistic diversity, bilingualism of every European, teaching and studying different world languages.

Recently, there have been signs showing that there is a certain shift in the direction of interest in national languages. Thus, for many Europeans, “proficiency in European languages” is a necessary condition (along with others) for self-awareness as a European (Standard Eurobarometer83). French researchers claim the awareness of national identity emerging in the French society along with the desire for unity and diversity of cultural manifestations – language, traditions (Cuchet, 2017; Nora, 2010). The French language issues are given special attention by the President of France, E. Macron. He initiated the international day of French language teachers on November 28, 2019, which emphasizes the importance of the French language in the world.

As we can see, the European Union is taking certain measures to encourage the study, preservation, and promotion of European languages. However, it seems that these efforts are not always effective enough to protect national European languages in the face of the expansion of English, which after Brexit is no longer the language of an EU member state, but is still used officially for all contacts within the EU.

Russia also witnesses a tendency towards the English language dominating business, culture, and education. There is a large-scale displacement of French and German, traditionally studied in Russian secondary schools and universities, by English, which leads to a decrease in the range of opportunities for young people to study and understand the culture, mentality, traditions, history of other nations decreasing the cultural level and ability to conduct intercultural communication.

The above mentioned implores to address the issue of stimulating the study and usage of European languages in international relations. In this regard, we propose a regional Strategy developed and implemented at Voronezh State University to promote the study of European languages on the example of French in Voronezh region “To learn the languages of the EU countries – to understand each other better” (hereinafter – the Strategy).

#### ***Strategy for promoting the French language in Voronezh region***

The strategy is the result of analyzing the extensive experience of Voronezh State University, one of Russia's high-profile educational and research centers, in implementing international cooperation programs. Its participation in global higher education and academic reputation is due to top places in national and international rankings together with the leading positions among Russian universities concerning the number of international projects included in the range of programmes supported by the

European Union. Currently, the University implements more than thirty Erasmus+ projects and has a wide set of foreign partner universities to engage in successful long-term cooperation (Yendovitskii, 2017).

#### *Prerequisites for developing the Strategy*

The results obtained while implementing two types of cooperation made prerequisites for the Strategy development.

The first concerns the implementation of Erasmus+ projects by the author: Action Jean Monnet, the educational module “European identity through the prism of European Union politics” (Identité européenne à travers la politique de l’union européenne (politique linguistique, d’affaires, d’immigration) – PolidEU 564786-EPP-1-2015-1-RU-EPPJMO-MODULE); Action 1 with the University of Lille (France); Action 1 with the University of Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée (France). All the three projects are aimed at developing students’ competencies that are necessary for working in the intercultural foreign-language environment: critical thinking, civic responsibility, tolerance and respect for the values of different cultures. The competencies required are formed in French, both in the framework of face-to-face classes included in the projects schedule (lecture modules and projects presented in French via the Moodle platform) and in various types of extracurricular activities (annual student conferences, business simulation games, scientific and practical seminars, publishing articles, professional skill competitions, etc.), which also involve French participants representing partner universities. More detailed information about the cooperation realized can be found on the website <http://euspace.vsu.ru> and in the author’s publications on the site eLIBRARY.ru.

The second type of cooperation relates to the implementation of bilateral University cooperation between Voronezh State University and French partner universities: National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations (INALCO) (Paris), The High School of Translation (ESIT) (Paris), University of Paris-est Marne-La-Vallee (Paris), University of Lille, Higher Institute of Commerce (Paris). The agreements provide various forms of academic cooperation aimed at intensifying and developing educational space: student exchanges, scientific cooperation, lectures, scientific conferences and seminars, professional internships, and joint scientific publications.

Taking into account the accumulated experience, the proposed regional Strategy is aimed at creating an attractive image of the French language in the eyes of youngsters, emphasizing its advantages such as a highest prevalence in the world, a mandatory use in international organisations along with English. The strategy is designed to emphasize that French is the language of big business, great culture and science, and high-quality education, which has a huge potential for young people’s future professional activities. The ultimate goal of the Strategy is to develop a series of activities that promote studying French as a first or second foreign language in secondary schools and universities. Voronezh State University’s partners while implementing the strategy are secondary schools in Voronezh region, including I.S. Nikitin gymnasium with intensive study of the French language (UNESCO associated school), universities in Voronezh, the Regional center for Franco-Russian cooperation, the regional Department for education and youth policy, and cultural institutions in Voronezh, Voronezh Institute of education development, language schools, language centers, Voronezh regional universal scientific library named after I.S. Nikitin, travel agencies, enterprises, regional branch of the Union of translators of Russia, French enterprises, the French Embassy in Russia, the French Institute in Russia, French universities-partners of VSU.

The proposed Strategy arranges the practised, already tested types of activities, and suggests new forms of activities. The target group is schoolchildren of all age groups, high school students, parents of secondary school students, students of non-language faculties and universities in Voronezh, representatives of business structures, and the general public.

*The content of the Strategy "To learn the languages of the EU countries – to understand each other better" includes the following stages:*

First stage: to conduct a survey to identify the reasons for choosing English among foreign language teachers in the Central regions of Russia; to prompt choosing a second foreign language; to show an image of the French language and expectations from learning French. Target groups of the survey: students, parents of primary and secondary school students, school-leavers enrolling at universities, students of non-language faculties and universities. Questionnaires are developed in partnership with VSU sociologists and are published on digital media (website SurveyMonkey.com and social networks). The survey is also conducted directly in secondary schools and universities. The analysis of the survey results is published as an article and posted on the websites of VSU and partners.

Second stage: to develop activities and the calendar of Strategies on the basis of survey results analysed and adapted for target groups, including:

- a series of cross-cultural, cultural, economic events to promote French and Francophone culture among the general audience (contests, competitions, weeks of French cinema/culture/cooking/business, concerts, plays, lectures, festivals, theme clubs, conversation clubs, meeting with French businessmen, scientists, diplomats, etc.). We work face to face as well as in the form of webinars, opting for digital technologies, going on-line and publishing results on forums, social networks, VSU website;
- a series of educational events: the French language Days in Voronezh, information days on studying in France, presentations of French enterprises and organizations in Russia and Voronezh, free French lessons for beginners.

The third stage: to develop new didactic material for teaching French to beginners. The materials are adapted, modernized and prove attractive to young people, taking into account their needs identified in the survey. To create didactic materials we develop:

- French lessons modules for beginners of different age groups (10-14 years, 15-17 years, students) employing Internet resources, 20 academic hours each;
- short educational videos (5-7 minutes) on various aspects of country studies of France and Francophonic world, designed in a playful way that is attractive to younger generations;
- MOOC, as the most engaging format for young people, based on the use of communicative teaching methods, encouraging independent studies of French, starting from the very beginning (6 weeks course, 8 academic hours per week). The developed MOOC contains linguistic, socio-cultural, methodological sections, “drilling”, evaluation criteria.

We'd better point out there are numerous digital resources developed by French didactic centers and available to French language teachers (TV5, Le Point du FLE, and others). However, a wide variety of task formats, a high level of language required for their implementation, even concerning those intended for beginners, make it difficult for beginners to learn French independently and to use them systematically. As a result, users may lose motivation to study French. Therefore, the MOOC format in our case is of greater

potential, since it is developed by professionals for specific purposes, that is, to learn French “from the very beginning”, and receives pedagogical support. The analysis of open educational platforms (“FutureLearn”, “OpenProfession”, “Open Education”) showed that the latter feature few MOOCs in French, with the exception of one course for B1-B2 level. Thus, the development of MOOC in French is a very promising direction in the methodology of foreign languages, cultures, intercultural communication, and country studies teaching.

The developed didactic materials are implemented during the Summer linguistic school and Saturday linguistic school which is held at Voronezh State University for schoolchildren of Voronezh region, at the French language classes in the Regional center for Franco-Russian cooperation. They are published online in open access for the general public.

The fourth stage: to analyze the effectiveness and coverage of the results of the work carried out within the framework of the Strategy, during conferences at various levels, in academic publications, in the University and regional press, on VSU, Voronezh Institute of education development, the French Institute in Russia, Russian and French partner universities websites, etc. As an example of the platforms for sharing the results of the Strategy implementation, the “Forum of Francophonie” is proposed. Its purpose is to discuss the results of implementing the Strategy's provisions, the effectiveness of its content, methods, and experience of implementation by teachers, representatives of Russian and French partner universities, businesses, and cultural institutions. Representatives of the Department of education and youth policy participating in the discussions will raise and elaborate on the issue of promoting learning of the French language at secondary schools of Voronezh region.

## 6. Findings

The outcome of some events within the Strategy (regional festivals in honor of the international day of Francophonie among schoolchildren and students, translation competition, song festival “Million voices”) reveals progressive trends in boosting the interest in the French language: an increase in the number of people taking the international exams DELF-DALF; a request for a second regional scientific and practical seminar on the problems of methodological support for teaching French as a second language in secondary schools; events dedicated to the first international French language teacher day (November 28, 2019); participation in the term training in French universities. One-time lectures on the cultures of France, held in the regional library named after I.S. Nikitin, have been transformed into a series of lectures “Calendar of French Culture”. The issue of spreading the findings of the Strategy to attract attention to the study of other European languages in the form of the “Week of European languages in Voronezh” is discussed.

## 7. Conclusion

The bottom line is, the current situation, marked by great economic, political, and social matters, makes the concept of intercultural communication even more important and considers it as an important component of European security. “Today, the European Union, European civilization, and the European continent face many challenges, both internal and external. It requires the solution to economic,

infrastructural, and scientific problems if we are talking about European civilization itself. Such moments of crisis force us to go back to our roots – to what Jacques Delors called “bringing the soul back to Europe” (Akulshina et al., 2017, p. 15). The languages of all peoples, of course, are the representation and very essence of the “soul” of each country, and thus the leadership and population of both the European Union and Russia inevitably faces the problem of fair development of multilingualism, as a factor that contributes to strengthening European security and prosperity, preserving their identity, intercultural understanding, and resisting cultural and linguistic dominance. A lot of the conflicts of today's world can be resolved within the international space on the basis of mutual respect, knowledge of the mentality, taking into account the intentions and traditions of the “other”. The key to success is knowing the language of the “other”, which gives the key to understanding it.

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