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**THE TECHNOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL  
COMPETENCE AT RUSSIAN AND FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES**

Rimma A.Safina (a)\*, Oksana A. Amurskaya (b)

(a) Kazan (Volga region) Federal University, Kremlyovskaya str., 18, 420008, Kazan, Russia, rsafina@mail.ru ;  
(b) Kazan (Volga region) Federal University, Kremlyovskaya str., 18, 420008, Kazan, Russia, oksana2181@mail.ru,  
89600469717

*Abstract*

The necessity to develop intercultural competence is recognised on both national and international levels. The European council includes intercultural competence in the list of key competences for experts in different professions. The main aim of this research is to compare the most important methods for the development of intercultural competence used with students at Russian and foreign universities: based on the study of the experience of the researchers and teachers who are the speakers of foreign languages and based on the level of intercultural competence in universities the main tendencies were revealed. During the research project: various approaches to the interpretation of the term “intercultural competence” were found, as well as how the term is used in the Russian and foreign literature; it became necessary to introduce the measures for the purposeful didactic influence on the professional intercultural competence with students at universities; different criteria for the choice of exercises were described and the organisation of didactical material procedures concerning the language.

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**Keywords:** Components of intercultural competence, interactive education, criteria for the choice of exercises, types of control.

## 1. Introduction

In the globalization era of modern educational paradigm the issues of intercultural communication are in the focus of modern science. The recent interpretation of the term “intercultural communication” supposes not only the knowledge in linguistic cultural studies, but the formation of motivation for the intercultural dialogue and guarantees efficient interaction with the native speakers of different languages and the bearers of various cultures.

The term “intercultural communication” was introduced in the USA in the 1950-s and was aimed to boost the efficiency of the work of the American diplomacy abroad. In Europe intercultural communication as the university discipline took place later, in 1970-1980-s and was associated with the immigration flow and the necessity to solve a number of corresponding problems. On the edge of the new millennium the faculties of intercultural communications were launched in a number of European universities, special courses in intercultural communication were developed.

In Russia apart from the foreign experience foreign language teachers were the initiators of the research of intercultural communication. In the 1990-s the intensity of intercultural interactions increased what brought it in the spotlight of linguistics as the scholars become increasingly aware of the fact that the pure knowledge of the foreign languages was not sufficient for the fruitful communication with the representatives of other cultures.

Since 1990-s, the paradigm in methodology of teaching foreign languages both in Europe and in Russia has changed. The intercultural approach has been scientifically justified and has determined the aims of learning a foreign language. According to the conception of a British scientist Byram (1997), it is not the culture of their target language country that is supposed to be in the focus of learning a language, but the methodology of acquisition of culture. Pedagogics which is oriented at the native speaker is being substituted by the one oriented at the cultural mediator, the intermedium between one’s own personality as the embodiment of one’s own culture and the personality of his partner – a bearer of a foreign culture (cited in Yelizarova, 2005, 219-230).

The notion of “intercultural competence” is one of the key terms of the intercultural communication theory and has a variety of theoretical justifications. A number of scholars regard this notion as the efficiency of the communication between the representatives of different cultures, thus as the result of intercultural interaction in the certain situation (Losche, 2009, 93). The term “intercultural competence” is also viewed as “the set of social skills and abilities that help an a personality to carry out communication with the partners belonging to other cultures in everyday routine and in the professional sphere” (Rot, 2006, 39).

On the early stage of the development of this subject Russian linguists regarded intercultural competence as a part of foreign-language competence and studied its formation in the frames of foreign language teaching (Yelizarova, 2005; Safonova, 1992; Furmanova, 1993). Modern scholars have reached the agreement that intercultural competence presents a complex multilevel phenomena, including a number of components, determined by the influence of culture on communication.

The theoretical and methodological works of domestic and foreign scholars in the field of theory and practice of intercultural communication served as the base of the current research (Belaya, 2011;

Grishayeva & Tsurikova, 2006; Golovleva, 2008; Grushevitskaya, Popkov & Sadokhin, 2002 and others.).

The problem of intercultural communicative competence formation from the position of lingvodidactics was elaborated in the works of the Russian scholars (Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 1990; Yelizarova, 2005; Safonova, 1992; Furmanova, 1993 and others.). Furthermore, the research is based on the methodology of teaching practices of intercultural communications (Losche, Puttker, 2009; Rademacher & Wilhelm, 1991; Reiners, 2007; Rot, 2006).

Thus two basic approaches to the study of the theoretical aspects of intercultural communication were formed in the Russian and foreign practice:

1. anthropological and cultural, based on the achievements in sociology, psychology, ethnography etc.
2. linguistic which refers the processes of intercultural communication to the speech processes by their nature (Kulikova, 2004, p.20).

Three main components of intercultural communication are pointed out in the modern scientific literature: cognition (knowledge), affection (the settings and emotional motivation) and behavior (Chernyak, 2015, p.48). With reference to that the following key factors, which determine the formation of intercultural competence, may be accentuated: certain linguistic and cultural knowledge; motivation and aspiration for acquisition of a foreign culture; personal qualities (sociability, open-mindedness, tolerance towards other values, readiness to build new social links). It must be noted here, that in the latest research scholars focus not only on the necessity to possess knowledge of a foreign culture, but allegedly on a less significant factor of recognition of one's own cultural identity (Grishayeva & Tsurikova, 2006, 309).

## **2. Problem Statement**

In the modern system of education intercultural communication is widely integrated in the learning process as one of the leading humanitarian disciplines. Thus scholars and methodologists are in the state of active search of ways of formation of intercultural communication and its control. The initial methods were introduced by foreign scholars, and nowadays domestic lingvodidactics can proudly present its own practices in the field of intercultural communication testing. Domestic exploratory work in this sphere is not aimed to control, but is applied as the methodology in teaching. Thus the current research is aimed to determine the ways of formation of intercultural competence, its strengths and weaknesses as well as to compare domestic and foreign approaches to intercultural learning in general

## **3. Research Questions**

Prior to the determination of the possible ways of formation of intercultural competence, we feel obliged to set the following research questions:

1. What were the basic interpretations of this notion on various stages of scientific development?
2. Which factors impose influence on the process of intercultural learning to the greatest extent?
3. Which models of the formation of intercultural competence are the most efficient?

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

The basic purpose of the current research is to determine the distinctive approaches to the criteria formation of foreign language exercises and textbooks selection and to the ways of intercultural competence level control. The research is based on the study of progressive experience of scholars in this field and teachers of foreign language and intercultural communication.

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

The methods applied in the current research include theoretical methodology (the study of the psychological and pedagogic domestic and foreign literature, related to the posed problem; the critical analysis of teaching of intercultural communication and the German language); empirical methods (questionnaire, tests, interactive exercises).

More than 80 models of formation of intercultural communication are developed on the present-day stage of its development (Chernyak, 2015). The pattern of intercultural teaching designed by the American scholar Bennet is considered to be one of the most wide-spread models. It includes six stages of teaching, which reflect the process of learners' promotions from ethnocentric views (negation, rejection, minimization of intercultural differences) to ethnorelativistic position (acceptation, adaptation, integration of intercultural differences) (Kulikova, 2004, p.52). Bennet's model has served as the base of the intercultural approach to education. However it is worth taking into account that this pattern cannot be regarded as universal and suitable for all the cases of intercultural communication and may possess certain divergences in its stages.

The theory of experimental teaching developed by Kolb has found a wide practical application. It was based on four consecutive phases of formation of intercultural competence: the concrete experience, reflexive observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimenting. Kolb's model is peculiar in the way that the theoretical knowledge on intercultural divergences are created in the process of transformation of the experience: the past experience becomes the object of reflections and observations, and reflections in their turn are transformed in abstract knowledge, which on the last stage is controlled in action and contributes to the formation of the new experience.

In lingvodidactics invaluable contribution to the development of intercultural approach theory was made by Furmanova, who pointed out the following stages of the formation of intercultural competence: 1) the informative phase – the introduction of extra culture-specific information, which is essential for task completion; 2) the comparative phase – the study of the general and specific elements, presented in the studied modus of behaviour of subjects in the foreign cultural environment; 3) the phase of adaptation – the projecting of elements of a foreign culture by the students on themselves; 4) the phase of application – cultural “immersion” and the start of intercultural communication (Furmanova, 1993, 341).

#### **6. Findings**

According to the numerous domestic and foreign studies, the formation of the comprehensive intercultural competence can take place exclusively in the course of foreign language learning. But in order to prepare a student for the interaction with another culture in the environment of university studies

it is essential to introduce intentionally a number of exercises in a foreign language class. The main purpose of these exercises is the encounter with the valuable dominants of culture of the target language country.

The extensive study of domestic and foreign sources in methodology allowed to reveal a number of universal approaches and methods to form the bases of intercultural competence. First and foremost we can refer questionnaires and test to such universal means. They allow the students to evaluate the level of development of various components of intercultural communication. For instance, “The questionnaire of intercultural development” by Hammer and Bennet is aimed to evaluate intercultural sensitivity: the authors present it as a valid instrument to be applied in the groups of respondents of diverse cultural commodity, different age and professions. A large number of tests is aimed to determine the level of tolerance in a personality, accepted as an ultimate condition in intercultural communication (for instance “Tolerance to indefinity” by Badner). The scale of social distance (Bogardus scale) is aimed to measure the degree of social and psychological acceptance of each other; the distance connected with ethnicity, nationality, age, sex, profession, religion is measured alongside with the distance between children and their parents. The number of tests and questionnaires is designed to determine the type of human behaviour in a conflict situation (for instance, the behavioural test in conflict by Thomas, the types of reactions in conflict situations by Kirschbaum).

Modern Russian scholars have also introduced a number of questionnaires, aimed at the formation and control of various components of intercultural communication: the ability to compare cultures, to predict the communicative behaviour of a partner and to comprehend it (the questionnaire by Plyzhnick “The evaluation of common and distinctive features of representatives of various nationalities”), to determine the level of empathy development (“The methodology of diagnostics of the level of emphatic capabilities” by Boyko), the evaluate the ability for self-reflection (the methodology of self-esteem on the level of ontogenetic reflection) etc (cited in Chernyak, 2015). The number of tests is aimed to determine ethnic self-awareness through the recognition of the respondent of his own ethnic group and his own subjective sense of belonging to it (“The diagnostic test of relationships” by Soldatova, “Types of ethnic identity” by Soldatova and Ryzhova, “An ethnic identity” by Romanova, the questionnaire “The stages of the cultural identity” by Plyzhnick). The tests on the determination of tolerance of learners were created on the basis of Western methodology (“The index of tolerance” by Soldatova et al.).

Self-reflection is regarded as the core component of all questionnaires and surveys in the case when the learners make the attempt to evaluate their own reaction on certain events of public life, connected with intercultural contacts. Self-reflection is viewed as a key stage in the process of recognition of intercultural similarities and divergences. Thus it is necessary to take into account the disadvantages of this method as in most cases the learners are unable to self-evaluate in unbiased way. As practice shows, they overestimate the degree of their tolerance and empathy. This is the reason why the questionnaire ought to be complemented by other methods of intercultural competence formation, for instance observation, interactive exercises or the method of intercultural assimilator.

The western psychologists have elaborated the special methodology of intercultural assimilator, which is aimed at the preparation for the intercultural interaction. This methodology, also known in Russian scientific literature as cultural integrator, is also directed to increase intercultural sensitivity, its key purpose is seen as teaching to view various situations from the angle of foreign culture, to

comprehend a “different” view of the world. The main advantage of this method is in its ability to display intercultural divergences in specific data of intercultural conflicts and get a feedback from the learner. As a rule such tasks consist of the brief description of a situation, involving the representatives of at least two cultures and several interpretations of the behaviour of characters, the so-called casual attributions, which present the explanation of the conflict situation. The examples of the situations may be borrowed from the press, ethnographic sources and may be specially designed for the certain learning task. The following factors are crucial in the selection of the learning situation: mutual stereotypes, conceptualization of traditions of foreign culture, role expectations, nonverbal communication etc. The feedback is carried out by means of the determination of the interpretation that would be appropriate from the angle of another culture. Some tests apply the method of unfinished statements, where the course participants have to formulate the possible reasons and the consequences of the described events.

The tasks of the cultural assimilator are viewed as the following:

- 1.the acquisition of isomorphic attributions: the ways of interpretation of human behaviour by representatives of foreign cultures;
- 2.the experience of their emotional reactions in the circumstances of interethnic interactions and their correction;
- 3.the formation of the tolerant thinking attitude in a foreign cultural environment.

In these days the vast amount of methods of intercultural assimilation, which are in most cases oriented at the comparison of value priorities, are being developed. The attempt to create a universal assimilator, which would allow to teach Americans to interact with the representatives of other countries, was undertaken In 1980-s in the USA by Bennet. Later the methodology was adapted to the other English-speaking countries. At the moment the application of cultural assimilators is accepted as effective means of information transmission concerning different countries. The above mentioned application reduces the influence of negative stereotypes and contributes to the simplification of interpersonal interactions in foreign environment. The application of computer tests is convenient and reasonable. In some cases an intercultural assimilator is applied in training sessions, with the results discussed and compared in groupwork, what allows to orientate oneself in a foreign culture without attributing the norms and standards of the native country to it.

Intercultural training, also known as the method of interactive exercises, is another method which acquired vogue in recent technologies of intercultural competence formation. The training exercises are targeted to trigger the certain behavioral reaction from a student in the environment of intercultural interaction. The exercises reconstruct particular realia, due to which the participants of the trainings on the one hand become aware of their own cultural affiliation, on the other- develop the capability for perception of alien elements of culture. As a rule, interactive exercises are applied on more advanced stages of learning a foreign language.

It is noteworthy to point out certain criteria, which the interactive exercises of the above mentioned type are supposed to correspond. Thus, the German scholar Rademacher (Rademacher & Wilhelm, 1991, p. 13) supports the point of view that exercises of such type are supposed to:

- 1.provide information on the particularities of foreign culture, lay the foundation for the comparison with one's own cultural value systems and norms;
2. motivate to acquire a foreign culture;

3. create conditions for positive perception of a foreign culture;
4. to raise awareness for cultural divergences;
5. to develop the capabilities to recognize common and distinctive features in various cultures, take intercultural divergences for granted;
6. to teach to perceive and evaluate various value categories;
7. to aid to comprehend the extent of one's own stereotyped thinking;
8. to uphold the position of one's own cultural identity (Rademacher & Wilhelm, 1991, p.13)

From the point of view of cultural studies we consider the exercises, displaying the divergences of cultural norms and standards, to be the most challenging ones. Notably, the situations may approximate the reality (for instance, the determination of the value scale for the particular culture, the evaluation of the conflict situation emerging at work) or they are fully imitated. It is noteworthy, that not only verbal, but nonverbal signals as well come into the view of the learners.

The awareness of the stereotyped thinking is one of the most crucial targets of interactive exercises. The justification of the chosen answer in multiple choice questions or of the selected behavioral reaction is regarded as the compulsory figure as these interpretations as a rule contain the stereotyped views of learners concerning the representatives of different cultures. The efficiency of training exercises was displayed in the works of Western scholars, but it is notable to mention that the above mentioned system is at the dawn of its development in Russian system of education.

Referring to the practical experience of teaching intercultural communication, the application of exercises as a course is regarded as the most effective way of formation of intercultural competence. This approach combines various methods and technologies and therefore allows the learners to examine various components of intercultural communication theoretically and practically and, as the result, it enables them to evaluate their own level of intercultural competence formation more precisely. Our empirical observations have shown that the course of exercises, based on the methodology of cultural assimilator, has contributed to the formation of positive dynamics in the tests on the determination of the level of ethnic tolerance and social distance. This can be justified by the fact that the situations offered in the methodology of cultural assimilator can be equalized to the past experience of the learners, which is later reflected upon and contributes to the formation of new conceptualizations concerning certain aspects of intercultural interaction. The application of the methodology of intercultural assimilators allows to reduce the influence of negative stereotypes and to extend the adapted perception of a foreign culture.

## **7. Conclusion**

To sum up, we would like to emphasize again the complexity of formation of intercultural communication being a challenging multi-level process. To run it smoothly and efficiently it is essential to take into account the main stages and principles of intercultural competence formation, which are seen as universal categories in the process of acquisition of various cultures. The basic difference in methodology of intercultural competence formation lies in the fact that Western scholars prefer informal training sessions, focusing not on intercultural divergences of certain countries, but on the formation of particular personal qualities, which provide successful communication between the representatives of various cultures. In Russia the foreign language teachers have served as initiators of intercultural

communication studies, and as a result the formation of intercultural competence is taking place alongside with the communicative competence formation and more conventional technologies are applied for that purpose (questionnaire, tests, observation). However, the final target of all the technologies applied is the formation of particular personal qualities, which will enable the student to lead successful intercultural communication professionally and in everyday life, preserving one's own cultural identity. To achieve stable and intensive increase in indicators denoting the formedness of intercultural completeness it is essential to provide adequate pedagogical assistance, which in its turn will provide the systematization of necessary theoretical knowledge concerning intercultural divergences and the experience of interaction with the representatives of a foreign culture.

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