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**Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future**

**ESP AS A TOOL TO DEVELOP  
SOCIAL CAPITAL AT UNIVERSITY**

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***Abstract***

This article deals with the modern tendencies of the current global community that put forward social capital as an integral part in the professional relations. Authors consider that students studying foreign languages acquire social capital as ability to socialize in a new foreign professional society and enhance their communication skills while learning, retaining exchanging culture and traditions that can make the process of integration and acquisition of language culture much faster. Dealing mainly with students' of science and technology needs and preferences in the language learning, special attention should be paid to socialization and social capital that are important when helping students avoid communication problems. In this article the definitions of social capital and foreign language socialization are given; it is also explained how to implement these notions with technically-minded students, no matter where they come from and what language experience they have. Conducting a number of tests, it was singled out the weak points at students' pre-university language training and there were outlined the steps how to overcome these difficulties and help students in the best possible way.

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**Keywords:** Foreign-language communicative competence, foreign-language society, language socialization, social capital.



## 1. Introduction

The tendencies of the current development of the global community demand merger and unification of all spheres of human life from education to economics and politics. Thus foreign language communicative competence which was introduced by Hymes (1972) has become an integral part of the current existing model of professional relations as well as social capital.

Language is inextricably linked with culture (Chernyavskaya, 2016). Its main social function is to preserve and transfer from generation to generation values, beliefs and traditions and conservation of any social group identity. In other words, language is an environment where groups retain their culture and maintain their traditions.

### 1.1. The role of language in modern society

Studies show that the loss of language means the loss of culture and identity. Edward Sapir noted in his works that language is a great lever of socialization, perhaps the greatest of all, language is a symbolic key to behaviour (Sapir, 2002). Consequently, being the leading lever of socialization, language is the basis on which the social capital of modern man is formed. And we fully share the opinion of Ariyan (2009), who argues that we should use those sufficiently broad opportunities that foreign language possesses to master the mechanisms, norms, strategies, tactics of social interaction, i.e. not to use its socializing potential.

### 1.2. The notion of social capital

We preface our purpose statement with a paragraph observing the approaches to the term "capital". We consider "capital" as the amount of benefits in the form of material, intellectual and financial resources used to generate more benefits. Speaking about social capital, it should be noted that, unlike other forms of capital, it does not exist outside the society and people. Social capital is the result of the interaction and interrelation between people in a certain community, expressed by a number of social connections and contacts, implemented in various social networks, such as family, friendship, work, clubs, religion, district, political beliefs and ethnicity.

So, we understand social capital as "sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by possessing a durable network...of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119).

Firstly, the concept of "social capital" in social science was used at the beginning of the 20th century to analyse such spheres of society life as health, education, urban development, the labour market, etc. This term was proposed by an American sociologist Hanifan in 1916 to describe those significant circumstances that affect the daily life of everyone (Hanifan, 1916). Despite the fact that social capital has nothing to do with the usual understanding of capital, measured by the value of personal property or cash, investing in social capital can lead, according to the researcher, to material benefits.

Many scholars note, the availability of social capital is the basis for successful social adaptation not only in a "native" society, but also in a "strange", foreign culture, allowing an individual to become an equal member of society. But in order to create social capital, meaningful in the new foreign community, to dispose it skilfully and to multiply it, a person must have a well-formed communicative competence that

allows him/her to avoid getting into the "language ghetto", language isolation from native speakers. Forced to communicate only with the countrymen, an individual cannot fully socialize in a new community and to remain a stranger, and consequently, he will not be able to achieve professional success.

## **2. Problem Statement**

We believe that teaching foreign languages at technical university should help to develop students' social capital by acquiring a foreign language competence. It will allow future specialists in hard science to socialize successfully in a new professional community, and will also introduce students to the conceptual system of a foreign language linguistic society and to its cultural norms and values. Moreover, it will contribute to the acquirement of professional ethical values, norms and standards.

### **2.1 The importance of foreign language competence acquiring**

Following Safonova (1996), we consider foreign communication competence as the level of fluency in linguistic, speech and socio-cultural knowledge, skills and abilities that allows the learner to communicate communicatively and appropriately to vary his speech behavior depending on the psychological factors of communication.

We believe that the formed communicative competence of other languages is not only the foundation on which the social capital of an individual is built, but also the basis of a foreign language socialization. By foreign-language socialization we mean the process of learning a foreign language by studying this language and inculturation, i.e. adaptation to cultural norms. Pavilionis (1987) notes in his work that the mastering of a foreign language is impossible without the process of socialization in a new society. He singles out the main characteristics of this process (Pavilionis, 1987, p. 37-40):

- the formation of an individual conceptual system;
- embedding in it the concepts of foreign culture;
- ability to speech activity based on the attachment of foreign language signs to certain fragments of the conceptual system.

Speaking about the relationship between the study of a foreign language and socialization, the American anthropologist Ochs (1988, p.14) notes that the mastery of the language and the acquisition of social and cultural competences do not develop independently of each other, and none of them is a prerequisite for the development of the other, but, conversely, these processes are closely intertwined with each other from the moment of man's entry into society. There are several groups of motives for mastering a foreign language by a specialist/ student: communicative, cognitive, value-oriented, self-assertion, the prospect of professional growth. These motives are interrelated and mutually complementary.

### **2.2 The main areas of socialization**

In the studies of language socialization, two main areas can be identified: socialization through the use of language and socialization for the use of language. The task of the process of socialization with the help of the language is the acquisition of tacit knowledge, which concerns not only the relationship of linguistic forms to each other, but also their referential and non-referential meaning and functions). The task of the process of socialization for the use of language is the use of linguistic means for coding and creating cultural significance. As a result, the understanding of the social organization of everyday life,

cultural ideologies, moral values, beliefs, the structure of knowledge and its interpretation is largely acquired through the language environment (Ochs, 1988).

As for the foreign language socialization of engineering students in the course of their training at university there are two levels. They are the level of cross-cultural communication competence and the level of professional communicative competence (Sidelnik 2017; Almazova, Khalyapina, & Popova, 2017; Popova, Almazova, Khalyapina, & Tret'jakova, 2017; Zakharova & Krasnoschokov, 2016).

The detailed classification of the criteria of professional socialization can be found in the paper by Chapkovich & Revyakina (2017).

### **3. Research Questions**

We should note that along with the general recognition of the increasing importance of language training in the context of the acquisition of non-linguistic professions and specialties in the modern system of language training, a number of contradictions are aggravated, the most significant of which are the contradictions between:

- the continuing processes of globalization in higher education and the lack of cross-cultural and comparative pedagogical research in the most dynamic areas of vocational training, including in the field of foreign language;

- the real significance of a foreign language as the most important condition for career growth and the low status of a foreign language as an academic subject;

- between the actualization of competency, cultural, humanistic approaches in the theory of general and professional education and the orientation of the majority of domestic textbooks and teaching aids to the implementation of the traditional approach in teaching foreign languages on the basis of knowledge and skills;

- the discrepancy between the goals of language training formulated in the standards of vocational education and the extremely inadequate by European standards the number of hours allocated for the study of a foreign language;

- the diversity of textbooks and insufficient development of programmed and technological support of the modern language training system. (Safronenko, 2006, p. 221)

On the top of these factors we should add intellectual stratification of students (Table 1) and low motivation of half of them.

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

The aim of this paper is to suggest the ways of gaining social capital through language acquisition and to describe how the above mentioned problems are solved at SFedU and MIPT. The approach in the study reported here is distinct from most past studies on this topic. It focusses on the impact of social capital development on students' successful career. By taking a global perspective, future specialists will be more competitive, mobile and flexible, and, as the result, more in demand among employers throughout the world.

### **5. Research Methods**

To implement the research, we used entry diagnostic and final tests of students' knowledge. In that way paper and computer tests designed by the staff of the foreign languages department were used. That helped us to analyze the students' communicative competence and work out the ways to overcome the drawbacks and arise students' motivation.

The interview and focus group discussion help us to unveil the reasons of the lack of motivation to acquire a foreign language, clear up the professional interests. By means of that it was aimed to develop the ESP courses at SFedU and MIPT and divide students into different levels of language learners (elementary, pre-intermediate, etc.).

The table below illustrates the results of the entry test for the first year students in 2017. We chose two largest Institutes of our university as the example.

**Table 1.** The percentage of students in different English proficiency levels

Level	Percent Amount	
	The Institute of Computer Technologies and Information Security	The Institute of Radio Engineering Systems and Control
Beginner (A0)	27,6%	43%
Elementary (A1)	28.1%	25.3 %
Pre-Intermediate (A2)	25%	17.6 %
Intermediate (B1)	9.4 %	3%
Upper Intermediate (B2)	6.3%	3%
Advanced (C1)	3.6 %	1.5 %

## 6. Findings

In the conditions described above, the formation of professional competence requires an increase in the proportion of independent work of the student, which implies constant self-education and self-development. Professional self-improvement, in its turn, is possible with developed analytical skills that need to be formed in the process of student training by combining traditional teaching methods, individual research activities and interactive forms of education.

In addition, the use of a foreign language in collaborative and experimental learning is considered highly effective for the development of information, analytical and professional competencies. The use of such teaching methods as business and role plays, as well as the method of projects are the most interesting and pragmatically directed forms of training having great theoretical and practical value.

At the Departments of Foreign Languages and Linguistic education of the Institute of Management in the Economic, Environmental and Social Systems of the SFedU, the formation of the social capital of students in the process of foreign-language professional socialization takes place in two stages of training: in the context of "general language training "(1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> semesters), and "the level of conceptual cognition, or professional language socialisation (5th-8th semesters) ( Sidelnik, Burenko, & Melnik, 2016). As for MIPT, the course of General English can last for 3 or 4 years of studying depending on initial level of the language learner. It is practised in order to form English speaking and listening skills in academic and socio-cultural context. Students also deal with additional scientific texts, but as it is proved by regular practice, students

can cope with technical texts easier and faster, while speaking and exchanging opinions give more difficulty.

Both for successful development of a professional secondary language personality of future specialists, and for the creation of the prerequisites for the formation of social capital in the course of foreign languages studying, the staff of the departments developed and applied in practice a series of textbooks on the course ESP. These textbooks were developed in accordance with the program requirements for the course "Foreign Language for Professional Purposes", for use in technical universities in the field of computer engineering, radio engineering, aircraft engineering, electronic engineering (Bondarev et al 2015; Bondarev, Bakulev, Trach, & Osadchaya, 2013; Bondarev, Lyaxova, Melnik, & Opryshko, 2015; Danilova, Melnik, & Yakovlev, 2017). In the course of work on each of them the situation of foreign-language professionally oriented communication is developed in discussion of the problems presented in the textbook.

The inclusion of multicultural educational material allows using the process of learning English to expand students' own outlook, awareness of the cultural diversity of the modern world and their own country. It is known that communication requires the ability to understand a language. However much of the communication is nonverbal: our body language, our attitudes, hand-shaking, etc. Some researchers estimate that up to 93% of all human communication is nonverbal, although according to recent studies, it's actually closer to 60%. That is why two years ago a special course for the engineering students "Intercultural communication in the informational society" was designed and added into the so called "students' basket of optional disciplines". Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology as well as Southern Federal University are the universities with a mixed national composition. They welcome a significant percent of students from different regions of Russia. The latest political events of 2014 added students from Ukraine to the traditional multinational composition of the SFedU. Despite the fact that they speak Russian, the practice of working with such students has shown that most of them have a keen desire to emphasize their own cultural identity. Foreign students from Central Africa, Latin America, Middle East and Asia are also interested in this course. Discussing the differences between the English and Russian cultures the students become aware of their personal discomfort which helps their better adaptation. We would like to stress the idea that the educational strategy should be formed taking into account the regional language educational policy.

Every year students' conferences take place at the university. Presenting a speech at the conference develops the skills of compiling a literary survey, highlighting the main idea, structuring the statement and presentation of the processed material. Public speaking enhances the student's confidence in his own abilities, allows him to fully reveal his creative and academic potential and develop basic personal, cultural and professional competencies.

The authors argue that such combination of different types of educational activity determines the multidimensionality and multifunctionality of the educational process. In this regard, the use of a foreign language in the teaching of a specialty promotes the circulation of professional knowledge and significantly expands the boundaries of information retrieval, which improves the quality of vocational training.

## 7. Conclusion

Analyzing the test results and summarizing the above mentioned we can draw the following conclusions:

- the sociolinguistic knowledge acquired during the training at the university, the assimilated social norms and values of a foreign professional society in the future will help the individual to build social networks in a new linguistic and professional community and thereby multiply their social capital, the presence of which will undoubtedly contribute to successful socialization and professional adaptation in the global world community;
- the use of such teaching methods as business and role plays, as well as the method of projects are the most interesting and pragmatically directed forms of training having great theoretical and practical value;
- participation in role-playing games, debates, round tables, in the preparation and presentation of projects and other forms of educational work simulate situations of natural professional communication;
- we would like to stress the idea that the educational strategy should be formed taking into account the regional language educational policy.

Thus, the inclusion of multicultural educational material allows using the process of learning English to expand students' own outlook, awareness of the cultural diversity of the modern world and their own country. and, as the result, our students are more in demand among employers throughout the world because of their global training.

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