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**FICTION AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING SOCIOCULTURAL
COMPETENCE**

Kseniya S. Kolobova (a), Olga V. Anisimova (b)*, Inna S. Makarova (c)

*Corresponding author

- (a) Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University (SPbPU), Polytechnicheskaya 29, Saint Petersburg, 195251 Russia, kz28@mail.ru, 9117906469
- (b) Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University (SPbPU), Polytechnicheskaya 29, Saint Petersburg, 195251 Russia, lesoleil81@mail.ru, 9111192264
- (c) Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University (SPbPU), Polytechnicheskaya 29, Saint Petersburg, 195251 Russia, inna-makarova@mail.ru, 9111235504

Abstract

Learning foreign culture, value perception of the modern world, understanding the importance of the human personality and the place it takes in the cultural process are getting more and more urgent in the context of a new culturological model presuming the realization of human cultural perfection mechanisms. Today, the contradiction between multidisciplinary opportunities of literature and highly unilateral use of its means in the process of developing students' pedagogical culture has become more evident. Insufficient development of artistic-cultural component conditions in the pedagogical culture determines the relevance, significance and the choice of topic of a given research. The paper aims at highlighting the importance of such disciplines as First and Second Foreign Languages History of Literature and Home Reading, which should be integrated into the course of First and Second Foreign Languages Speech Practice in order to develop students' sociocultural competence. The emphasis is put on the significance of fiction studies in preparing professionals having not only good linguistic skills but also realizing a wide range of cultural peculiarities of foreign countries. On the example of three chapters from the novel by Günter Grass the approach to using historical facts in developing sociocultural competence is revealed being supplemented with a number of pre-reading and post-reading activities suggested to students learning German as a second foreign language.

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1. Introduction

Growing importance of knowing foreign languages on the level allowing communication with representatives of different countries to set international and personal contacts, achieving understanding between people, globalization and integration of countries into the technical and academic environment accompanied by creation of joint venture companies and manufactures, expansion of universities, cooperation with foreign educational institutions, companies and organizations in the field of research and technology exchange, various technical-scientific information significantly increase the role and place of a foreign language in the system of higher professional education. As sociologists note, “in the modern world situations of linguistic contacts are getting more and more massive. Individuals, families, social groups, districts, regions and states come up with the necessity to take into account quite various linguistic experience” (Dreton, 1991, p. 20). Thus, nowadays bilingualism/polyngualism functions as “a compensative system opening access to a higher level of cultural-civilizational development” (Kolykhanova, 2000, p. 2).

Russian system of education imposes high requirements to the training of qualified personnel in different fields ready to conduct professional activities and cooperate effectively on inner and foreign cultural levels (Kuklina & Cheremisinova, 2018). To achieve the level of a highly qualified specialist after graduating from the university the student must have not only professional knowledge and skills but also the ability to respond and behave correctly in concrete life situations (Gural' & Tereshkova, 2016). Nevertheless, as foreign languages teaching experience shows, knowing the language might be insufficient to communicate properly. It often happens that people speaking one and the same language do not understand each other – the reason for such misunderstanding is the difference in cultures. That is why the primary aim of teaching foreign languages is to provide intercultural communication and understanding between partners. Learning a foreign language, students acquire new means of communication to get an access to the values of world culture and particularly to the cultural values of the country which language they are studying: its history, geography, science, literature and arts.

However, foreign languages acquisition is connected not only with learning culture but also with the formation of ability to understand the mentality of native speakers as well as their own national peculiarities. In this regard, it is necessary to speak about sociocultural aspect of teaching foreign languages. Sociocultural competence is the skill to realize interpersonal and intercultural communication using knowledge of national and cultural peculiarities of your own country and foreign country/countries acquired at foreign languages classes as well as in the process of learning other subjects (interdisciplinary knowledge). It presumes acquiring:

- knowledge of importance of native and foreign languages in the modern world;
- information of a sociocultural portrait of foreign countries, their symbols and cultural heritage;
- commonly used vocabulary and realities of a foreign country: traditions (the way people spend weekends and national holidays), folklore (tonguetwisters, proverbs, sayings);
- ideas of similarity and difference in traditions between your own country and a foreign country: the peculiarities of lifestyle, daily routine, culture (world famous sights, outstanding people and their input in world culture), as well as famous pieces of foreign literature humour

being a very important aspect of national culture characterizing the peculiarities of people's mentality;

- ability to recognize and use basic norms of etiquette typical for foreign countries (clichés, most widely used evaluative remarks) in oral and written speech in situations of formal and informal communication;
- ability to introduce your own country and its culture in a foreign language as well to help foreign guests in daily life situations.

Sociocultural competence is the readiness and ability to hold a dialogue, which presumes knowledge of both national and foreign cultures. This is the tool of educating internationally oriented personality realizing world interdependence and entirety as well as the necessity of intercultural cooperation in solving global problems of humanity (Saphonova, 1993). For this particular reason, linguistic cultural background turns out to be so important. It is worth mentioning that no language can be studied isolatedly as a set of lexical units and grammar rules. "Languages are not mere collections of labels or nomenclatures attached to pre-existing bits and pieces of the human world, ...each community lives in a somewhat different world from that of others and... these differences are both realized in parts of their cultures and revealed and maintained in parts of their languages" (Carroll, 1953, p. 135). In this respect, it is highly important to keep this thesis in mind setting successful business and professional contacts. As R.D Lewis states, "In the world of rapidly globalizing business, Internet proximity and politico-economic associations, the ability to interact successfully with foreign partners in the sphere of commercial activity, diplomatic intercourse and scientific interchange is seen as increasingly essential and desirable" (Lewis, 2006, pp. 27-28).

The selection of syllabuses of most important academic disciplines taught to students from Applied Linguistics as well as our personal teaching experience let us outline the necessary complex of pedagogical conditions allowing to form students' readiness to perform professionally in terms of sociocultural approach. Interdisciplinary integration while teaching foreign languages is one of them (Saphonova, 1993). "The task to form the compulsory minimum of knowledge as well as to teach students to recognize and translate correctly into another language sociocultural facts characteristic for a particular nation or nationality, mastered by the majority of its representatives and revealed in the language of this or that linguistic community" (Verbitskaya, 2009, p. 200) is defined in terms of sociocultural approach.

The statement of indivisibility of acquiring a foreign language and parallel learning of foreign culture, its history and modern time seems to be commonly-accepted. If before it was enough to transfer concrete knowledge and develop accompanying skills, nowadays it is not so any more, which is proved by recently held theoretical and practical researches. In this respect, in accordance with the revised State Standard, education now comprises such important subjects as Cultural studies, Country Studies and Literature among others. Alongside with teaching foreign languages, the State Standard aims at developing positive attitude towards foreign languages and the culture of people speaking them. Linguistic education presumes knowing culture, history, foreign country realities and traditions, presenting students to the dialogue of cultures, introducing them to the achievements of national cultures, developing universal culture, understanding their native language and culture role in the mirror of other nations' cultures. Background knowledge mentioned above, plays an important role in educating future linguists for development of sociocultural competence is impossible without it.

2. Problem Statement

However, as modern higher schools show, the number of academic hours given to teaching disciplines connected with the formation of sociocultural competence, such as Foreign Literature, Home Reading, Country Studies and Intercultural Communication, is decreasing annually. Thus, in the Institute of Humanities in Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, the number of academic hours planned for the discipline First Foreign Language History of Literature taught during one semester is equal to 4 lectures and 8 seminars. Obviously, this is not enough for full-scale learning of the subject and giving the whole picture of the history of literature, its key representatives and national peculiarity of major works created by British and American writers who glorified the English speaking culture in the whole world. Moreover, in Applied Linguistics syllabus, there are no such disciplines as Second Foreign Language History of Literature and Home Reading, so, as a result, students studying German, French or Chinese as a second foreign language have no opportunity to get even a general idea of given subjects, thus being largely prevented from developing the sociocultural competence key for the given speciality.

Nowadays, teachers face the problem of how to make their classes more effective and practice oriented (Kamayeva, Kazayeva, Zolotova, & Ganyushkina, 2016). At Applied Linguistics, foreign language teaching is closely connected with literature studies. However, the emphasis is often placed on revealing the factual information and stylistic analysis, didactic features of literature as the cultural artifact remaining half revealed. In the case of a limited number of academic hours given for disciplines aimed at developing sociocultural competence, it is highly important to develop the most effective and aim-oriented course which will allow students to manage a big content at a small amount of time.

It is fair to say that the meaning of fiction in the global pedagogical context can hardly be overestimated. Such philosophic categories as civilization, personality, justice and freedom are transformed into artistic images, their understanding being the core of the process of the subject orientation on cultural and pedagogical values. In this regard, it is important to differentiate two types of culture: high and low. Using literary texts in teaching foreign languages, we aim at teaching high culture to students. B.H. Erickson (Sinagatullin, 2003, p. 45) defines it as masterpieces which contribute to the national art, whereas low culture is what is perceived as popular culture. The scientist also distinguishes objective and subjective products of culture, where objective are food, clothes, etc., and subjective are represented by values, attitudes and norms of behaviour. Speaking about the way to develop students' sociocultural competence most effectively, we suggest focusing on subjective high culture categories at Home Reading classes for they appear to be more sophisticated and critical.

Being dialogical by its nature, literature provokes a culture dialogue (historical, artistic, aesthetic, civil, national and international) influencing the formation of pedagogical culture and editing the personality's value guidelines. Deep penetration into the foreign text with the help of a wide range of tools of literary analysis, understanding fiction on a certain level of literary competence, allow students to reconstruct, interpret and internalize its foreign content on a qualitatively different level. For this reason, integrated learning of foreign languages and foreign literature seems to be one of the major conditions of developing students' communicative competence. Integrated learning or subject-language learning is considered to be the necessary condition of preparing future specialists capable of becoming members of international scientific and business communities (Almazova, Baranova, & Khalyapina, 2017).

The course of foreign literature is complex by its very nature. A future specialist in the field of foreign languages must understand some common problems and issues of foreign literature, see clearly its role in aesthetic, intellectual and ethic education as well as in the development of speech and, of course, know literature interesting to his or her agemates. Fiction functions not only as an original aesthetic subject but also as a means of perception of life, interests and psychology of the social group which life is reflected in the book. The central and principal task of literature is the formation of readers' value-based attitude to life and, primarily, social and aesthetic ideals of a new generation. In this context, especially fruitful is the use of authentic materials including a considerable number of sociocultural facts, which help to form a particular learning environment. Among specific functions performed by such materials are:

- inclusion of sociocultural information (linguistic realities);
- opportunity to feel foreign environment in which immediate social relation (native speakers communication) takes place;
- learning specific skills characteristic for the representatives of a foreign culture;
- teaching speech patterns.

At the same time, authentic materials demonstrate the language functioning in immediate social contact, in sociocultural context, with the help of linguistic realities, through formation of foreign linguistic environment, illustrating behavioural patterns of foreign culture representatives, which helps to develop specific skills typical for the representatives of a particular language, teaches speech patterns and embodies the principles of culture dialogue and cultural conformity.

3. Research Questions

How is it possible to help students from Applied Linguistics develop sociocultural competence on the basis of studying fiction at the classes of Home Reading as an aspect of Second Foreign Language Speech Practice?

4. Purpose of the Study

Within this context, two major tasks of a given research are as follows:

- drawing attention of pedagogical community to the above mentioned problem of insufficient number of academic hours given for First Foreign Language History of Literature and the absence of such a discipline as Second Foreign Language History of Literature in the syllabus of Applied Linguistics in the majority of institutions of higher professional education in Russia;
- showing on a particular example the way sociocultural competence can be formed at the seminars on Home Reading regarded as an independent aspect of the discipline Second Foreign Language Speech Practice.

5. Research Methods

Two principal methods used in the research are as follows: the method of analysis and the method of generalization. Analysis allowed us to point out crucial historical events touched upon in the novel by

Grass and important in the context of developing students' sociocultural competence. Generalization method resulted in designing the set of activities based on three selected chapters aimed at developing students' sociocultural competence.

6. Findings

In the situation when the number of academic hours given for fiction studies at the faculty of Applied Linguistics is constantly decreasing, the only solution is to separate in the discipline Second Foreign Language Speech Practice such an aspect as Home Reading, aimed at developing sociocultural competence on properly selected pieces of literature.

As an example, which will clearly show some of possible variants of putting this idea into practice in the context of the German language studied as a second foreign one, we have chosen the novel by a classic of German literature – “My Century” by Grass (1999) which represents a cycle of 100 historical sketches and novellas, a sort of historical chronicle. Such books rich in “true” history, as many researchers note, are the best for class activities: “The stories and the lives of historical characters help readers see the details of everyday life that are not incorporated into textbooks.” (Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, & Pierce, 2000, p. 546). “My Century” is a collection of 100 stories in the chronological form expressing the author's subjective view on his times. Every year is represented by a particular episode or theme, which, in the author's opinion, is important and worth being told retrospectively. Comparatively short stories (no more than 4 pages long) are each indicated by a certain date highlighting an important event, which took place in XX century: poison gas attack, inflationary pressures, Fuhrer coming to power, Crystal Night, defeat at Stalingrad, Reichstag fall, the Berlin wall construction and fall, etc.

In his book, the author introduces the history “from below”, i.e. told from the point of view of ordinary Germans, victims of history, people of little mark: pupils and teachers, dissidents and agents, men and women of different age and social status. In this historical panorama we can hear the quarrel of combatants Remarque and Junger, see Mühsam dying in the concentration camp, Liebermann, watching the torch light parade organized in honour of Hitler, and so on and so forth. History is being watched in the trench and in hospital, in prison and in the stadium, at the meeting and at home. Grass gives his characters the opportunity to speak about the events independently, giving personal judgement to them. The writer seems to transform into his characters: the participant of Colonial War in China, the concentration camp executioner from Dachau, Nazi military correspondents, the woman who restored Berlin ruins, the policeman working during arson attacks on refugees' halls of residence in Rostock, etc. To show the way sociocultural competence can be developed with the use of fictional writing, we have selected 3 chapters.

The 1st depicting events of 1900 is devoted to the Boxer Rebellion in China which started as a reaction of Chinese troops to the intervention in the national economy by such foreign countries as Russia, France, Japan, the USA, Great Britain, Italy, Germany and Austria-Hungary. The plot is based on a substantial historical discourse realized in a variety of different means, among them:

- I. introduction of real participants of the historical event: “Als wir endlich in Tientsin ankamen, waren alle schon da: Briten, Amerikaner, der Russe, sogar richtige Japaner und Truppchen aus kleinen Ländern. Die Briten waren eigentlich Inder.“ (Grass, 1999, p. 8);
- II. inclusion of different realities:

1. historical
 - a. commencement address of kaiser before sending German troops to China, which is introduced in the narration with the help of direct speech;
 - b. name of the historical event central for the given story – Boxeraufstand: “Denn als unsere Kompanie einmarschierte, schien alles vorbei zu sein, was bedauerlich war. Dennoch gaben einige Boxer keine Ruh. Die wurden so genannt, weil sie insgeheim eine Gesellschaft waren, die ‘Tatauhue’ oder in unserer Sprache ‘die mit der Faust Kämpfenden’ heißt. Deshalb redeten zuerst der Engländer, dann ein jeglicher vom Boxeraufstand (Grass, 1999, p. 8);
 - c. historical realities reflecting epoch (Kaiser Wilhelm II, Boxeraufstand, König Etzel);
2. military (die neuen 5-cm-Schnellfeuerkanonen, Maxim-Maschinengewehre, Spezialhelm);
3. geographic (Platz am Chienmentor, direkt vor der Mauer, welche die Mandschustadt vom gewöhnlichen Teil Pekings trennt, Platz Chienmen);

The 23rd chapter is devoted to the political event, which happened in Germany in 1922 – the assassination of German Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau on June 24, 1922, when he was killed on the way to work in his limousine. The terrorists were members of the right-wing group Organization Consul whose hatred was provoked by the Treaty of Rapallo signed between Germany and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic as well as the fact that Rathenau was Jew. One of the terrorists launched a grenade while the other took several shots at the Minister. All these facts are open to public and can be easily found in any history reference book. Thus, the actuality of the events described by Grass is based on:

- absolute temporal marker indicating the exact date of event;
- use of real people’s names (Rathenau, Kanzler Wirth, Ehrhardt, Tillessen, Erzberger);
- detailed description of a real historical event.

The 49th chapter centres about the Monetary Reform held in West Germany on June 20 – 21, 1948. The plot is based on a real historical event – the reform held in three Western occupation zones, members of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) created by 16 European countries in order to coordinate the credit and economic policy within the Marshall Plan: “Und die haben auch dafür gesorgt, daß es die D-Mark nur in der sogenannten Trizone gab und nicht in der sowjetischen auch. Deshalb hat der Russe dann drüben seine eigne Mark drucken lassen ... und unser Deutschland nun auch noch vom Geld her geteilt wurde” (Grass, 1999, p. 172-173). Reichsmarks were replaced with Deutsche Marks: “...aber nicht mehr Reichsmark, sondern Deutsche Mark, denn mit dem Reich war ja sowieso alles vorbei” (Grass, 1999, p. 172). At that time, the post of the Minister of Economic Affairs was occupied by Ludwig Erhard responsible for the economic recovery of American-British zone: “Später hat es geheißten, das verdanken wir alles dem Erhard mit seiner dicken Zigarre” (Grass, 1999, p. 172). To aid Western Europe to rebuild its economy after the end of World War II, the USA initiated Marshall Plan. Banks and funds aimed at economic development received money from goods supplies sold throughout Western European countries. Shelves empty before July 19, 1948 turned out to be chock full next morning: “Denn was wir am nächsten

Tag schon zu Gesicht bekamen, das konnte einen so richtig schwindlich machen. Auf einmal, als halt wer „Hokuspokus“ gesagt, waren die Schaufenster alle voll. Wurst, Schinken, Radios, normale Schuhe, keine mit Holzsohle, und Anzüge – Kammgarn! – in jeder Größe. Sindnatürlicheres gehortete Warengewesen” (Grass, 1999, p. 172). The exchange looked as follows: on June 20, each citizen including juniors received so called per capita money equal to 40 DM, then followed by other 20 DM: “... Jeder bekam vierzig Mark und einen Monat später nochmal zwanzig, aber nicht mehr Reichsmarker, sondern Deutsche Mark” (Grass, 1999, p. 172). In a given extract the markers of the historical discourse, as we can see, are the names of political leaders of Germany of that period of time (Erhard mit seiner dicken Zigarre) and historical realities (Trizone, Reichsmarker, Reich). The plot also develops due to the Economics vocabulary (Sparkasse, Umtausch, Geld, D-Mark, Deutsche Mark).

The analysis given above clearly demonstrates the range of possible variants of using fictional writing at the classes of Home Reading to help students enrich their knowledge of world history, economy and culture, as a result developing their sociocultural competence. Below we would like to share a little fragment of class activities based on one of the chapters from “My Century” containing pre-reading activities, a short extract from the novel and post-reading tasks.

I. Aufgaben vor dem Lesen:

1. Was wissen Sie über die Reichskristallnacht?
2. Wer hat an dieser Nacht teilgenommen?
3. Welche Nachfolgen hatte dieses Ereignis für Deutschland?
4. Möchten Sie mehr davon wissen?

II. Lesen Sie den Ausschnitt aus dem Kapitel:

„Wißt ihr, was sonst noch alles in Deutschland an einem 9. November geschehen ist? Zum Beispiel vor einundfünfzigjahren genau? <...> hat er uns dann die Reichskristallnacht erklärt. Die hieß so, weil sie im ganzen deutschen Reich stattfand, wobei viel Geschirr, das Juden gehörte, kaputtgegangen ist, darunter besonders viele Kristallvasen. Auch hat man mit Pflastersteinen alle Schaufenster von Geschäften, deren Eigentümer Juden waren, zerschmissen. Und auch sonst wurde viel Wertvolles sinnlos zerstört <...> viele Synagogen genau abgebrannt wurden und daß man einundneunzig Juden einfach ermordet hat“.

III. Aufgaben nach dem Lesen:

1. Haben Sie etwas Neues erfahren? Was?
2. Warum heißt diese Nacht so?
3. Was gehört hier zu der wahren Information?
4. Welche Wörter hier gelten als Realien?
5. Finden Sie mehr Information darüber.

Thus, the traditional view on the world history is subject to a great transformation. The events well known to every reader from formally compiled course books and history books as well as their significance for “big politics” are considered through the prism of constantly changing and unusual points of view from “below”. In particular episodes, Grass himself becomes the storyteller thus making the book, as a German linguist Volker Neuhaus says, “a complex autobiographical resource” (Neuhaus, 2003, p. 327). Wherever

a typical German is, he cannot hide from history. The present day is not delightful, past is sometimes recollected with nostalgia, future is something people want to believe in. History does not die, it continues ready to cross the age-long barrier. As the book title shows, the previous century is in fact the century of Günter Grass. The book as it is successfully reflects the writer's personal opinion about past events becoming didactic not only in the context of writer's literature heritage but also when it comes to the modern society's state of mind.

7. Conclusion

Summarizing the above, it is necessary to mention that reading fiction is one of the most important aspects of education. Analyzing fictional writing on a lexical and stylistic levels, students master productive linguistic reading, which "does not only promote a better understanding of the text, but also better understanding of the author's style in general." (Almazova, Eremin, & Rubtsova, 2016, p. 51). As Professor Chernyavskaya states, "Linguistic analysis serves as an additional tool of highlighting the author's communicative-educational and pragmatic intensions and values." (Chernyavskaya, 2016, p. 76). While reading students get acquainted with the most interesting sides of the society's life learning its culture. Encouraging cultural enlightenment of students, reading also helps to master a foreign language performing simultaneously as the means of informative, educational and profession oriented activity of learners as well as the means of self-education and creativity. In the process of studying in Applied Linguistics, learning the strategies of fiction reading, students become capable of reading foreign texts of different levels going deeper in the content which helps to form and develop their linguistic, communicative, sociocultural and, as a result, professional competences.

At the same time modern practice shows that traditionally used techniques, methods and models of teaching fiction reading do not help students create a sociocultural image of a foreign country making it harder to understand the sociocultural background of the book, its main idea and the author's intension. In other words, there are no effective tasks developing students' sociocultural competence. It is also obvious that fiction, being the culture's artefact, has a wide linguodidactic potential for developing students' sociocultural competence. Creating the world of foreign culture, literature helps to understand its realities on the example of fiction writing. Thus, the necessity to integrate learning fiction in the global process of learning foreign languages to build foreign sociocultural environment seems to be obvious and demanding detailed and profound research.

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