

**DCCD 2020****Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding****TRANSCULTURAL APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH AS AN  
INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE: GOAL SETTING**

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***Abstract***

The article introduces “transcultural communicative competence” as a fundamental methodological category in the framework of transcultural approach to English language education. Based on critical literature review, the paper identifies the key geopolitical and linguistic prerequisites for the emergence of transcultural approach, mainly cultural and linguistic glocalization, the World Englishes Paradigm conceptualization, increasing academic interest in the notions ‘translingualism’ and ‘transculturalism’. In spite of the growing academic interest to the issue, there is still lack of substantiation of transcultural approach around the globe and in Russia. To contribute, the authors elaborate on transcultural approach distinctive characteristics that, as opposed to intercultural approach, which focuses on cultural integration leading to gradual convergence and world’s universalization, promote cultural divergence and students’ ability to transit across several linguacultures without losing their own unique cultural identity. As a result of the study, the article presents the authors’ definition of transcultural communicative competence as a core component of transcultural approach to English language teaching and its structure comprising cognitive (knowledge), operational (skills), and axiological components (attitudes and values). On the basis of the findings presented in the paper, further research will be directed at modelling other components of the system including content, principles, strategies and techniques as well as a course book to realize transcultural approach to teaching English as an International Language (EIL).

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**Keywords:** Transculturalism, translingualism, transcultural approach, transcultural competence.



## **1. Introduction**

The recent scholarly attempts to conceptualize cultural diversity in multi-ethnic, multilingual states determined by sociocultural processes of globalization and glocalization have triggered the research of translingualism and transculturalism as feasible solutions for harmonious cultural interaction in the 21st century. The key linguistic findings in the field have naturally integrated into various scientific areas mainly pragmatics, sociolinguistics, literary studies, translation studies and foreign language acquisition pedagogy. The study of translingualism and transculturalism as critical notions of modern global communication is characterized by a considerable research gap especially in terms of its application to methodology of teaching English.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Recent research in related sciences has created a starting point for research aimed at implementing the ideas of translinguism and transculturism in the theory and methodology of teaching English as an International Language. Nevertheless, there are only a few recent works on the theory and classroom practices of transcultural communicative approach (García & Otheguy, 2020; Jenkins, 2015; Kubota, 2018; Matsuda, 2019; Wei, 2018), and almost none by Russian scholars. Therefore, it is urgent that scholars in linguistics and language pedagogy unite their efforts to substantiate the teaching strategy aimed at developing students' ability to transit across several linguacultures for effective transcultural communication.

## **3. Research Questions**

The paper discusses the following research questions: the impact of translingualism and transculturalism as manifestation of present day geopolitical transformations in the world on culture-oriented approaches to teaching English as a lingua franca; substantiating the methodological category 'transcultural approach' to teaching EIL; defining its mission, modelling and structuring its major goal – developing students' transcultural communicative competence.

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

The present article aims at a critical review of recent research on translingualism and transculturalism and its impact on the need of reassessing EIL teaching methodology; at evaluating the relevance of transcultural approach to teaching EIL in Russia from a theoretical standpoint and in terms of the plausibility of its results, as well as at endeavoring to define a newly formed methodological category 'transcultural communicative competence' and its components.

## **5. Research Methods**

The basic research methods used are analysis, synthesis, generalization, abstraction, modelling, and library research.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Geopolitical and linguistic prerequisites for transcultural approach

The end of the 19th century marked the transformation in social organization and interaction that generated a new type of civilization – a global one characterized by intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole. The expansion of economic, political, and cultural horizons, determined mainly by technologization and rapid development of communication media, was highly facilitated by the transition of English into an international language, which emphasizes the role of English as a lingua franca. However, like any process that brings changes, globalization has been subject to disputes among scholars, as many link it to the imposition of Western ideals, values, suppression of local specificity and independence, having caused the pursuit of national identity preservation. The process got the name ‘glocalization’ to highlight its core principle – reaching unity in its unique diversity.

Glocalization made a great impact on the world linguistic situation. The English language lost its status of the English-speaking world property and started to be perceived as an international commodity resulting in the emergence of the World Englishes Paradigm, the theory that aims to prove the existence of independent and legitimate English varieties. According to it, the spread of English from the Inner Circle to the Outer and then to the Expanding Circle was paralleled by its transformation that stems from acquisition of distinctive features underpinned by users’ native language and cultural identity (phenomena of nativization and acculturation). For instance, recent studies made by a Russian linguist Proshina (2016) make it possible to claim that the Russian variety spoken by educated language users has also acquired its official status as far as it possesses its own unique distinctive features such as lack of opposition of short and long vowel sounds, e.g., /i: - i/, usage of the imperative for expressing requests (RE1: Bring me the soup!; SE: Could you please bring me some soup?), etc. Therefore, the definition of the term ‘variety’ (in Rus. variant) given by Proshina (2017) reads as follows: “a translingual sociolinguistic formation that has resulted from cultural and language contact characterized by distinctive features that reflect an autochthonous language and autochthonous culture, intrinsic to the whole speech community not to a single individual” (p. 161).

The concept of ‘translingualism’ as argued by Proshina (2016) in this case serves as an example of the impact the above-mentioned ‘duality’ (globalization – glocalization) has on culture and language, being a new transitive, liminal phenomenon, which is a compromise in a conflict. This compromise can this way be considered a solution for harmonious cultural interaction in the 21st century, an explanation of the way communication works in heterogeneous contact zones. We support Canagarajah’ idea (2017) that in modern linguistic reality dominated by translingualism and its counterpart transculturalism identities and discourses are not recognized as mutually excluding notions. That implies that moving into a different speech community with its own discourse does not require one to leave behind other discourses and identities (Canagarajah, 2017). What is more, heterogeneity of those today is a norm, consequently, speakers might “shuttle” between different contact zones constructing mixed discourses and identities. As the founder of transculturalism theory Ortiz (1947) puts it, it is “the process of transition from one culture to another’ (p.

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<sup>1</sup> RE = Russian English;

SE = Standard (British or American) English used as a model in English language teaching in Russia.

102). At the same time even though speakers do not have to be restricted by their native linguistic or cultural backgrounds, or discourses of dominant groups, they still do not suppress their own individual linguacultural identity but might exist in several communities concurrently.

The discussed 'movement' is often needed for reaching communicative goals, for negotiating meaning as long as translanguaging and transculturalism are guided by a functional, practical role of the language, not a prescriptive one that is grounded in the concept of a language norm. In case of a feasible misunderstanding, speakers are capable to go beyond their own culture to build up a new third culture. Canagarajah (2013) in his book provides the following classification of negotiation of meaning strategies:

- 1) envoicing – encoding one's identity and their intentions in language resources they use;
- 2) recontextualization – having knowledge that interlocutors will both use different cultural frames or language norms, and being prepared to achieve intelligibility across these differences;
- 3) interactional – adopting reciprocal and collaborative strategies (can be listener-initiated – lexical anticipation, request repetition, request clarification, participant paraphrase, etc., and speaker-initiated – spell out the word, repeat the phrase, be explicit, avoid local references, etc.);
- 4) entextualization – monitoring and managing productive processes by exploiting the spatiotemporal dimensions of the text (retaining the characteristics of one's English variety, simplification, regularization (foregrounding of forms that are explicit) (Canagarajah, 2013).

## **6.2. From intercultural to transcultural communication as applied to English language teaching methodology**

The linguistic transformation of the English language set the stage for the revolutionary shift in modern language teaching theory. A conventional approach to teaching English as a foreign language with its accentuation of the UK and the US cultures does no longer meet the requirements of modernity. This approach is based on the dichotomy of a native VS non-native speaker rooted in the notion of 'norm', which, first, does not exist as one codified set of rules that covers all the language layers and, second, perpetuates unethical linguistic and cultural dominance, unacceptable for today's generation worldview. Therefore, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is being slowly replaced with the concept of English as an International Language, which emphasizes the role of English as a lingua franca, recognizes the equality of world Englishes, as well as stimulates the expression of one's national identity.

Until today, the attempts to shift the traditional outlook on language education have relied on the intercultural communicative approach. It is crucial to clearly see the differences between intercultural and transcultural communication to rationalize its incompetence for the given aim – to prepare students to use EIL on a global stage.

Intercultural communication focuses on the exchange of ideas and cultural norms when a dominant culture affects the culture in contact. As stated by scholars, acknowledging diversity, its main aim is still to integrate, which inevitably leads to further assimilation, acculturation (Guilherme & Dietz, 2015). Russian scholars substantiate a new innovative viewpoint on intercultural communication as opposed to that of Guilherme's, highlighting the idea that there should be no domination on the part of any of the contacting cultures. They should share an equal status. In other words, the national identities of the communicants are

transformed, interact and interpenetrate but leave the communicants' national-cultural identities intact (Tareva, 2017).

But the situation becomes different in transcultural communication which, on the other hand, as claimed by Malinowski in the preface to Ortiz' book (1947), is

a process in which both parts of the equation are modified, a process from which a new reality emerges, transformed and complex, a reality that is not a mechanical agglomeration of traits, not even a mosaic, but a new phenomenon, original and independent...it is an exchange between cultures... [that are] active, contributing their share, and cooperating to bring about a new reality of civilization. (p. 11)

Ortiz (1947) highlights that it does not imply assimilating into another culture, but is more of a mixed process that involves two stages: deculturation and neoculturation, and this new cultural phenomenon has something of both cultural constructs but at the same time is different from each of them.

### **6.3. Transcultural communicative competence as a goal of teaching EIL**

The linguistic and cultural reality that highlights the ideas of glocalization, which determine its relevance, explains the need for changes in modern ELT methodology as long as our current goal is to prepare students for communication in any contact zone they will encounter in the future, to enable them to adapt to the given communication context but still keep their unique cultural identity using EIL. Thus, the goal of language education today is to get students ready for transcultural communication on the global stage.

Being aware of the transformation of the ELT mission, the professional community in Russia has initiated theoretical research aimed at substantiating transcultural approach as one of the culture-oriented approaches to ELT. From the point of view of system-and-structural paradigm of cognition in educational research substantiated by Bim (2014), any teaching methodology, being a system, is a unity of goals, content, principles, teaching methods, teaching aids and materials, teaching process, and teacher-student interaction in the classroom. The core component of the system of transcultural approach to ELT is transcultural communicative competence. The term 'transcultural competence' was coined by Pratt and Fabb (1987). In her understanding, it is based on the idea of 'cultural translation' between two different worldviews. The Modern Language Association's report expands on that stating that it is "the ability to operate between languages," and adding that "transcultural understanding is the ability to comprehend and analyze the cultural narratives that appear in every kind of expressive form" ("Modern Language Association's report", 2007, pp. 3-4). Another perspective comes from the sphere of international business studies and reads as follows: "the capability to connect different points of view through the elicitation of dilemmas and their reconciliation" (Trompenaars et al., 2009, p. 443). As pointed out by Guilherme and Dietz (2015), the key thought that unites all the definitions provided above, is that transcultural competence stimulates reconciliation of differences that leads to efficient dialogue of cultures. At the same time, the ability to reconcile differences requires a speaker to develop a specific set of communicative skills needed to functionally realize the transition.

Thus, we can define transcultural communicative competence as follows: learner's readiness and ability to use the English language for successful interpersonal transcultural communication in a

multicultural environment going beyond their own culture whilst transiting across mixed discourses and identities without losing their own individual national-cultural identity.

The model of transcultural communicative competence as applied to language teaching in higher education comprises three major components: (1) cognitive (knowledge), operational (skills), and axiological (attitudes and values). It is crucial to highlight that the above-discussed ‘duality’ of transcultural approach is reflected in the dual character of its components that represents cooperation of universal and local levels needed to embody both the need for individual national-cultural identity preservation as well as mixed discourses and identities construction.

Thus, our current vision of the transcultural communicative competence structure can be summarized in Table 01.

**Table 01.** Transcultural communicative competence

<b>Transcultural communicative competence components</b>	<b>Transcultural knowledge and skills</b>
Cognitive component	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge of the nature of linguistic and cultural diversification, the English language global spread, its pluricentricity, the specificity of the multilingual nature of present day communication;</li> <li>- Knowledge of distinctive culturally-determined linguistic characteristics of world englishes;</li> <li>- Knowledge of universal and local levels: basic knowledge of distinctive characteristics of one’s local English variety and others;</li> <li>- Knowledge of one’s local culture and other world’s historical-cultural regions’ distinctive characteristics</li> <li>- Knowledge of one’s local culture influence on communication with the representatives of other cultures as well as influence of other cultures on one’s verbal and non-verbal behavior.</li> </ul>
Operational component	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To navigate in the English language global varieties, the ability to identify and distinguish them;</li> <li>- to choose and implement required negotiation-of-meaning strategies, such as envoicing, recontextualization, reciprocal and collaborative strategies, and entextualization;</li> <li>- To prevent, mediate, and resolve transcultural conflicts for differences reconciliation.</li> </ul>
Axiological component	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Awareness of the value of cultural and linguistic diversification;</li> <li>- Recognition of the equal status of English language varieties;</li> <li>- Acceptance of and tolerance to differences;</li> <li>- Detachment from the borders of one’s own mindset;</li> <li>- Recognition of limitedness, one-dimensionality, relativity of any viewpoint;</li> <li>- Recognition of the admissibility of the existence of other mindsets without abandoning one’s own, but developing its multidimensionality.</li> </ul>

## 7. Conclusion

The global linguistic and sociocultural environment that is constantly changing determines the role of the English language in communication as well as transforms its guiding principles. Due to glocalization that began the process of sweeping away boundaries inside B. Kachru's model, the notions of 'standard' and 'norm' have lost their relevance, and prescriptivism was soon replaced with pragmatic acceptability or functionality. That determined the need for developing speakers' ability, on the one hand, to be flexible in the usage of English which implies certain communication negotiation strategies that help to understand and be understood despite the culture one belongs to, and the variety spoken, and, on the other hand, be 'complete' in terms of one's own national-cultural identity without it being suppressed by a dominant one. Thus, today's global interaction in EIL is a vivid manifestation of transcultural communication rather than intercultural, due to the fact that intercultural communication focuses on cultural integration leading to gradual convergence and world's universalization rather than cultural divergence and students' ability to transit across several linguacultures.

Hence, geopolitical and linguistic factors that brought about the transformation of the status of English from EFL to EIL demand that professional community should turn to transcultural teaching strategy to meet the new challenges in language education at large.

In our opinion, future research on transcultural communicative approach worldwide will contribute to the transformation of current professional community's attitude to English varieties and language education policies, as well as equip researchers and language teachers with adequate teaching strategies and techniques and new transcultural coursebooks and other teaching aids.

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