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**REFLECTION OF CULTURAL PECULIARITIES IN TEACHING  
RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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**Abstract**

The article is devoted to the issues of including socio-cultural component in teaching Russian as a foreign language. Socio-cultural component is considered as a goal, means and the result of foreign students' motivation to master the Russian language. The purpose of this work is to study the choice of educational aids containing socio - cultural component to create psychological and pedagogical conditions for the development of students' socio-cultural competence. The paper describes the influence of the environment, the role of the teacher and teaching course content aimed at the formation of students' socio-cultural competence, as well as the process of social education of migrants in a foreign cultural environment. The result of the research is to develop a special training course that would optimize the processes that contribute to the effective entry of foreigners studying Russian into a new cultural environment and society. The introduction of the training course on the formation of socio-cultural competence in an educational process has shown that the components of the socio-cultural course in teaching Russian as a foreign language help to increase internal motivation, and therefore become more conscious in language acquisition. Russian as a foreign language should have a special role to play in considering and discussing issues that reveal the peculiarities of the Russian mentality and its lifestyle. That is why the issue of developing and implementing appropriate teaching aids and techniques for the formation of students' socio-cultural competence is so urgent.

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## 1. Introduction

Stretching the boundaries of language interaction in the modern world has determined the increased importance of studying cultural characteristics in teaching a particular language as a foreign one. It is obvious that the stability of Russian society nowadays directly depends on the process of including migrants into the system of social ties and relations. These circumstances make it necessary to find new approaches to define the purpose of education, the content and structure of the educational process, and to reform all social institutions, including the field of education in a multicultural society.

The activation of migration processes is associated with a deep understanding of complex socio-cultural and socio-psychological problems (Karpenko, 2019).

This is also confirmed by the fact that a large number of foreign students study at universities in the Far East. They seek to gain cultural knowledge about this country, to develop the ability for cross-cultural communication, and to acquire the necessary level of communicative competence. It is obvious that there is a dialogue of cultures between Russia and the Asia-Pacific countries. East and West represent two, in many ways opposite, cultural traditions, mentalities, and code systems.

These traditions manifest themselves not only in all varieties of spiritual values, but also in the way people exist. Western and Eastern traditions differ in understanding various concepts of the world, attitudes to nature, the role of a human being in the world and in the society; his relation to the state, government, law; in the value orientations of an individual; in the meaning and mechanisms of knowledge; in relation to religious faith, etc.

## 2. Problem Statement

The accumulation of new experience in a foreign cultural environment begins from the moment of relocation of a migrant. Entering a new socio-cultural environment is inevitably associated, to a greater or lesser extent, with culture shock. While the teacher-mentor seeks to use the educational potential of the source culture for sociocultural education, cultural environment can negatively affect an individual and hinder the processes of successful adaptation and inclusion a foreign learner into a foreign cultural community (Burlakova, 2018).

To understand the cultural and socio-cultural features of our country, it is important for students to form their ideas about the perception of the world, a new lifestyle, social norms, traditions, customs, values and acceptable behavior (Vavichkina et al., 2000). This can be achieved through formal and informal communication of foreigners in different situations regardless of the topic, whether it is a household, business, scientific field or self-education.

Learning unfamiliar social environment peculiarities entails a number of difficulties that foreigners have to face (Pogukaeva et al., 2016). Shifting climate zones, adverse effects of weather conditions, food and housing factors, educational process, and the impact of a number of social factors can cause "culture shock". It is known that a majority of students experience a "culture shock" after their arrival. They are supposed to have a dissonance between their ideas about the cultural heritage of this country and the realities that they have to face in everyday life in a new sociocultural community. A mitigating factor is that the Far

Eastern region and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region have established quite strong relations that promote cultural exchange and the development of socio-cultural knowledge.

The concept of 'culture shock' reflects a complex of disorders that occur in the process of adaptation to a different culture (Richter et al., 2000). The term "culture shock" first appeared in a scientific research conducted by the scientist Oberg in 1960s. In his opinion, "culture shock" or "cultural fatigue" is "a consequence of anxiety that occurs as a result of losing all the usual signs and symbols of social interaction", in addition, when entering a different culture, a person has very unpleasant sensations (Oberg, 1960).

The author highlights the features that appear when interacting with an unfamiliar culture:

- a sense of loss (status, familiar environment);
- tension from the efforts that a migrant makes to adapt;
- feelings of inferiority;
- rejection when contacting representatives of another culture;
- anxiety, disgust, or resentment when analyzing differences between cultures;
- role diffusion.

Obviously, the key reason for the appearance of such symptoms is the difference in cultures, which can be very significant. The cultural background of an individual nation includes symbols, images, and behavioral stereotypes that determine a person's behavior in his everyday life. But even this is subordinate when compared to the fact that, once in an unfamiliar culture, a person is faced with completely unfamiliar ideas about the world, norms and, most importantly, values.

When integrating the process of social education of migrants into the conditions of a foreign cultural environment, it is necessary to take into account an important idea that the consequences of culture shock can be not only negative. This is a necessary state, the so-called turning point to start the process of adaptation to new conditions. Psychologists note that when experiencing stress, a person absorbs the elements of a new culture, increases his cultural level quickly and naturally. Stress of this kind has received a special name i.e. "enculturation stress" (the term was introduced into scientific use in the early 1990s).

American researcher Adler develops a U-shaped curve ("adaptation curve"), which consists of 5 stages (Adler, 1975).

For the first 6 months of stay in a new country, a migrant feels a sense of euphoria, believing that his goal (studying abroad) has been achieved. Adler calls this period a "honeymoon." Then comes the second stage called "lapping" according to Adler, during which (from six months to a year), a person begins to feel pressure of a "foreign" culture. There is a sense of rejection on the part of the local people. The symptoms of "culture shock" start to manifest themselves. A person tries to solve internal problems by getting closer to his compatriots.

The third stage is "reintegration" (1.5 years stay in a new country). This is probably the most difficult period of the five stages, because the inner negativity of a person begins to transfer to others. It is at this point that some migrants decide to return to their homeland, while others, on the contrary, work to overcome the obstacles, and begin to learn a new language, engage in communication, establish friendships and thus specifically concentrate internal efforts on overcoming cultural differences.

Naturally, after this critical stage, a person has self-confidence, a sense of success in adapting to a new society and culture. Adler calls the fifth stage "comfort". This is a favorable period during which the

final "inclusion into the culture" takes place. However, it is worth recognizing that not everyone reaches this stage. In any case, statistics show that passing through these five stages is a very long process (5-7 years) (Adler, 1975). "U-shaped curve "means" good, worse, bad, better, good".

It is worth listing personal characteristics that will ensure successful integration into a foreign cultural environment. These parameters can be considered as effective ones in social education of migrants in an educational institution, which can be supposed as "landmarks" of pedagogical support. These characteristics include professional competence, high self-esteem, sociability, extroversion, openness to different opinions, interest in the environment and new people, ability to cooperate, high self-control, courage and perseverance.

The following conditions such as goodwill of local residents, willingness to help migrants, their desire to communicate, the possibility and availability of communication with representatives of another culture (education process in general and extracurricular activities, hobbies, cooperation classes), general positive attitude towards another culture, etc. can be considered as facilitating external factors that ensure the formation of the listed above characteristics in the process of social education.

### **3. Research Questions**

The educational environment, in particular, the study of Russian as a foreign language, allows migrants to create necessary conditions and develop competencies for successful inclusion into a foreign socio-cultural environment.

It is the so-called realization of social order that returns interest to learning the Russian language and develop motivation (Bilotserkovets et al., 2000). We face aspiring foreigners, who need intensive training courses different specialized education in various fields including elements of general everyday topics, conversational and communicative goals to get prepared for testing alongside with the organization of their entire stay in a specific territory of the country. The application of this information is associated with various professional fields including the business sector and tourism development, which motivate migrants to learn Russian for special purposes.

According to the author of the concept of communicative approach, Passov (1991), a foreign language culture must be included as a core component in foreign language teaching. At the same time, a foreign language as an academic subject will be able to fully perform its functions when educational, cognitive, developmental and educational aspects are considered equally in foreign languages teaching. In other words, learning a foreign language culture should be considered not only as a means of interpersonal interaction, but also as a means of broadening individual's spiritual horizon and adapting his values. The socio-cultural aspect has great potential in this regard. It allows students to get acquainted with the cultural heritage of a foreign country, as well as compare this knowledge with the cultural characteristics of their country and cultural values in general.

The use of socio-cultural approach in teaching Russian as a foreign language in the context of a dialogue of cultures is determined to establish a close relationship between language and cultural education. This principle is based on respect for interacting cultures, broadening knowledge about peoples, rules of behaviour, exchange of opinions and experience, familiarity with traditions and customs. The dialogue of

cultures is a deliberately chosen position that allows one to resist arrogant cultural isolationism and all forms of unequal relations between cultures.

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

The Russian language is not only a communicative intermediary, but also a translator of the values of world culture, a means of international and interethnic communication. One of the most important motives for studying RFL is also the desire to join the culture as part of European and world culture.

In this regard the task of a teacher of the Russian language is to minimize the difficulties of the learning process, especially when it comes to such a complicated language as Russian. This is reflected in the choice of teaching aids, its quantity, the structure of a lesson, rational consideration of the realities of the native culture, their comparison, drawing analogies when explaining information and consolidation of acquired information. All this helps to optimize the process of learning and increase foreign students' motivation.

To do this, we observe the following important training principles that are:

- based on behavior modeling in regular situations of everyday communication;
- based on the constant activation of monologue / dialogic speech in everyday situations;
- problem-based learning as a means of creating motivation;
- gradual process of learning cross-cultural communication;
- situational and thematic arrangement of educational aids;
- the use of authentic materials of regional specifics (stories of local TV, newspaper articles of the local press with the coverage of the events of the city and region, usage of national component, etc.);
- creating a favorable socio-psychological climate that will help maintain internal motivation to study RFL;
- inclusion of a value component into teaching RFL.

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

The authors used a simulation method and an experiment that outlined the course of the study.

#### **6. Findings**

The recognized complicated and multi-dimensional issue of the internal motivation of foreign learners makes it especially a forward-looking topic for this research. At present, there are many related publications that observe the subject, structure, and means of inner motivation. Most of them agree to the fact that

- 1) inner motivation is aimed at both learning experience and learning outcomes;
- 2) motivation is closely connected with the training course content.

Teaching aids can and should include and provide more than only the language under the study because teaching foreign students to socio-cultural skills will enable them to do well in the foreign language environment (Maine Lingxia, 2016). It aids them to develop such important features as

sociability/communication skills, role-based manner maintained by the etiquette, and the ability to find the best solution in different communicative situations quickly as the same communicative/conversational situations need different approaches in various cultures. So, for example, the Chinese when meeting people ask, 'What's your last name?' or 'What's your precious last name?' In the Russian speech etiquette, the same question (about the last name) is considered to be impolite when people make new acquaintances. Here is another example. When the Chinese meet people for the first time, they often tend to show their respect and shake the hand of the person they are talking to, while it does not seem acceptable in dealing with the Russians. Since the lack of socio-cultural knowledge and poor awareness in this field, it can become a significant barrier to effective communication in a foreign environment, cause misunderstanding and miscommunication/confusion. Therefore, this incompetence also makes adaptation difficult as a whole, so it seems appropriate to promote learning Russian as follows

1) within the context of the Russian culture reflected in the language. Russian words are presented as culture-specific concepts that correspond to the items of everyday life, traditional folk culture, stereotypes of the Russian speech and extralinguistic behaviour, etiquette, and texts of national and cultural content.

2) within the context of a dialogue of cultures: Russian and a native language. It is possible to reveal their traits and find common features that unite cultures of different peoples who speak different languages during that dialogue. This approach can be an important means for realizing diversity and recognizing and understanding the values of different cultures.

As part of the national and regional component, foreign students who learn Russian, as representatives of the Far Eastern Region, find it important to become familiarized with the history of the peoples inhabiting the territory and their cultural traditions and customs.

The result of this research is the socio-cultural aspect interpretation in teaching Russian as a foreign language, the development of methodological techniques and methods for presenting socio-cultural content component as a specialized course of study. The offered special course is nothing more than a depiction of the lifestyle and spiritual values of the Russian people so that a learner can gain the knowledge of what is natural and specific for Russians, their mentality, and the manners of social behaviour.

Before starting the development, the authors identified a range of issues, the solution of which should achieve the main goal of the special course, namely

The issue of obtaining new socio-cultural information.

As teaching aids, the authors propose to use current newspaper articles that not only contain information on socio-cultural content, but also lexical and grammatical phenomena, examples of speech behaviour.

2. The challenge of overcoming sociocultural difficulties which can lead to partial or complete misunderstanding.

Here a student is invited to explain and comment on the nationally biased units that are most difficult to understand in the texts included in the special course.

3. The matter of looking for the ways of 'being included/integrated' into a foreign social environment, changing views on a foreign culture that are 'tied' to their ideas about their homeland.

This problem is supposed to be solved by differentiating with the native culture and by comparing the Russian and Chinese cultures.

The problem of selecting methods, techniques, and exercises aimed at more effective language mastering.

The authors review various methods used in foreign and national literature to solve this problem. The researchers suggest a large number of methods of active learning. Many exercises they offered were translated into Russian and used in this special course. Many exercises presented in the special course are their original content authoring.

Based on the levels of socio-cultural competence development offered by Safonova, the socio-cultural competence development through the designed special course for foreign students who study Russian will take place as follows

- students master the basic notions within the proposed problem, accumulate and enlarge knowledge related to this issue at the first level;
- the second level involves the activities provided by a special course that students perform being supervised and guided by a teacher;
- the final or the third level is intended to perform student efficient independent activity as well as the creative use of the acquired cross-cultural communication skills.
- These principles become the basic patterns of the developed special course and are implied in the structure of each section.

The theoretical model of the special course consists of 3 stages:

1) Motivational and persuasive stage is aimed at creating positive motivation by involving cultural curriculum resources from both countries. At this stage, students are introduced to the concept of ‘socio-cultural competence’; they find out and discuss the main problems of intercultural communication. Newspaper articles that meet the following principles are used as motivation:

- matching the aids to the topic of the lesson;
- cultural and country-specific intensity /variety;
- students’ appropriate age criteria, interests and mental potential;
- distinguishing between their native culture;
- reliable and objective information;
- the aesthetic appeal of background knowledge;
- the general character is a selection of teaching aids that comprise the most relevant facts of present-day reality.

2) Analytical and synthetic stage trains skills for using language and socio-cultural knowledge while learning Chinese. This level of modeling of socio-cultural competence is improved by exercises on texts containing socio-cultural information;

3) Implementation and control stage is aimed at developing skills for using the acquired knowledge in intercultural communication practice through creative tasks. It is based on the self-activity principle.

The entire course is divided into three large modules. Each of them represents a classified communication situation within the socio-cultural context of the Russian language.

## 7. Conclusion

Despite the available instruments of foreign students' adaptation at university, the search for ways to 'introduce' them into a foreign social environment, changing views on the Russian culture continues. However, as the survey shows, foreign students are strongly connected to their ideas and views on their native country.

Thus, the mentioned problems can be solved by differentiation with the native culture of students, by comparing the Russian and Chinese cultures. This will let foreign students understand the fact that some phenomena differ greatly from their understanding of them in the socio – cultural reality of the foreign world. What is more, the system of ethical values of two Russian and Chinese authentic cultures cannot be the same.

The study allows the authors to come to the following conclusions:

- 1) Co-learning language and culture helps to make learning more effective.
- 2) Introduction of knowledge of the socio-cultural background provides exploring the foreign culture and rethinking their native culture. Moreover, it helps to solve the problem of creating a positive learning motivation.
- 3) The most effective way to analyze Russian cultural phenomena is a clear differentiation from the native culture, which develops a tolerant attitude to the foreign culture.
- 4) Socio-cultural competence is an important step in mastering a general cross-cultural communicative competence. It is aimed not only at socializing with Russia's representatives but also with fellow students, representatives of their native culture. In other words, it develops students' communication culture in general.
- 5) The study of the value component of the new culture allows one to facilitate the adaptation process.

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