

А. А. Прохорова, М. А. Васильева

Важность формирования межкультурной образовательной компетентности в процессе обучения иностранному языку в российском техническом университете

Данная статья освещает вопросы внедрения межкультурного компонента в процесс обучения иностранному языку. Социокультурный подход в преподавании иностранного языка сопряжен с использованием языка как средства познания мира и иноязычных культур, интеллектуального наследия англоязычных стран и их народов, а также как инструмента преодоления межкультурных различий. Авторы предлагают новый подход к преподаванию иностранного языка с использованием новых информационных технологий: International Studies Project (ISP), направленный на преодоление лингвострановедческой интерференции, которая может привести к серьезным ошибкам. ISP, интегративную основу которого составляет интернет-ресурс, включает основную информацию о пяти ведущих англоязычных странах, проверочные тесты (quizzes) и командные соревнования, что позволяет грамотно выстроить систему аудиторных и внеаудиторных занятий. Эффективность проекта видится в внедрении новых форм языкового образования через применение современных информационных технологий, ведущих к улучшению межкультурной лингвистической компетентности учащихся и усилению мотивации к изучению английского языка.

Ключевые слова: английский для специальных целей (ESP), межкультурная коммуникация, социокультурный подход, “International Studies Project” (ISP), языковая подготовка, новые информационные технологии.

A. A. Prokhorova, M. A. Vasilieva

Importance of Cross-Cultural Education in the Process of Language Training in Russian Technical University

The article discusses the issue of intercultural education in the process of foreign language training in Russia (Russian Technical University). A socio-cultural approach to language teaching is closely connected with the use of the foreign language as a means of exploring the world and national cultures, intellectual heritage of English speaking countries and their people, as well as a tool of overcoming cross-cultural misunderstandings. The authors suggest a new approach towards teaching a foreign language on the basis of new information technologies: International Studies Project (ISP) aimed at overcoming culture-caused linguistic interference which may lead to serious mistakes. ISP supported by the Internet-resource includes the basic information about five leading English-speaking countries, check tests (quizzes) and team competitions that allow to build a complete system of class and out-of-class activities. The effectiveness of the project lies in the implementation of the new forms of language education via use of modern information technologies, leading to the improvement of the students' intercultural linguistic competence and intensification of English-learning motivation.

Keywords: professionally-oriented English, cross-cultural communication, a socio-cultural approach, International Studies Project (ISP), foreign language teaching, new information technologies.

Introduction. During the Soviet Union period the status of the Russian language was obvious since it was the only common language on the whole territory of the USSR and served as a tool of cross-national communication between fifteen republics within the country.

Upon the collapse of the USSR the appearance of sovereign states choosing different political, economical and national values, denying the previous priorities in its development, influenced the language situation greatly in many countries of the former Soviet Union. If one takes a look at the states formed right after the collapse of the USSR, one might notice that the major issue of that time was the influence of the Russian language on the fates of

national cultures and languages. It was during this time when a huge campaign was launched. The consequences of the Russian language domination over the national languages in the former USSR were evaluated. As a result, the bilingual situation was thought to be “politically harmful and scientifically unsound” in the speakers' assumptions at various local conferences. Besides, there were certain tendencies of getting rid of the Russian language in some territories of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

In a number of countries inside the CIS the government bodies took and are still taking a very tough look at limiting the Russian language in all spheres of their society. This process is clearly demonstrated

in the sphere of education when either the amount of hours for studying Russian is dramatically limited or this subject is entirely eliminated from the curriculum of the national schools. Besides, the teachers' training has almost been stopped and the publication of all Russian text-books has been discontinued. In this connection, it should be noted that there has been a sharp reduction of TV and radio programmes and what is more, the decrease of informational, educational and cultural continuum owing to ousting the Russian language from all kinds of Mass Media.

It is interesting to note that the total number of population on the territory of the CIS is 272.4 mln and about 260 mln can speak Russian: 147 mln people are native speakers, while 113 mln speak Russian as a second language. Therefore, 12.4 mln citizens of CIS cannot speak Russian at all [5]. Consequently, all non-Russian speakers would have been able to study Russian as an international language inside the former USSR provided they had had a chance; however, it may not be possible today.

Despite the fact that Russian is being underestimated, there are lots of people who are still interested in it. Moreover, it is the language accepted by United Nations Organization. Russian culture is getting more and more popular and welcome in the world. It serves the aims of successful communication.

Theoretical Background. What place does the Russian language take in the national communication? According to the sociolinguistic researches in CIS and some other materials represented in the Bank of Linguistic Data of the Russian Federation (project № 99-04-00202a), 'It is evident that the Russian language occupies its leading place as the main tool of overcoming the language barrier between the former citizens of the USSR' [1. P. 18]. However, the modern generation having no opportunity to speak Russian due to the above mentioned reasons, has to study some foreign language, mainly English. Unfortunately, this alternative means of getting over the language misunderstanding in the countries of the CIS has not widely spread yet for certain reasons mostly of educational nature.

Today English is reasonably considered to be one of the widely spread languages in the world. As Anna Mauranen states: "English has established its position as the global *lingua franca* beyond any doubt; along with its status, it has become one of the symbols of our time, together with globalization, networking, economic integration, and the Internet" [11. P. 7]. English is known to be spoken by 1.5 billion people and about 1 billion are studying it intensively. Actually, English is the third most commonly spoken lan-

guage in the world. The second place belongs to Spanish, and Chinese is the unquestionable leader. However, "The people who speak English throughout the world also increasingly speak different Englishes. English is indigenized and takes on local colorations which distinguish it from British or American English and which, at the extreme, make these Englishes almost unintelligible one to the other, as is also the case with varieties of Chinese" [8. P. 62].

In the USA there are about 215 mln people speaking English. In the UK – about 58 mln English speaking citizens, in Canada – 18.2 mln, in Australia – 15.5 mln, in Ireland – 3.8 mln, in the Southern African Republic – about 3.7 mln and in New Zealand – 3.5 mln of the population speak English as their first language. Judging by these facts one might realize that English is spoken all over the world, therefore, the globalization of this language is obvious. In the book "English as a Global Language" David Crystal distinguishes two main ways for the language to become global. "Firstly, a language can be made the official language of a country to be used as a medium of communication in such domains as government, the law courts, the media, and the educational system. Secondly, a language can be made a priority in a country's foreign-language teaching, even though this language has no official status" [7. P. 4].

Another scientist Braj B. Kachru writes: "When we use epithets such as *global*, *international*, and *universal* with English we are not necessarily talking of homogeneity and uniformity. We should not. The messages have to be learnt, acquired, absorbed, and appreciated within the appropriate cultural contexts of the mantras. The medium provides a variety of shifting cultural "grids" through which we gain access to the multiple canons of the language: American, British, West African, East African, South Asian, East Asian, and so on" [10. P. 16].

At present English is considered to be the international global language. India and China are the leaders in the amount of people speaking English as a second language. Nowadays it is English which is the language of medicine, Mass Media, art and sports, aviation and diplomacy and other forms of international communication. "Russian, for example, held privileged status for many years among the countries of the former Soviet Union. English is now the language most widely thought as a foreign language in over 100 countries such as China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Egypt and Brazil. ... It becomes the language which children are most likely to be taught when they arrive in school, and the one most avail-

able to adults who ... never learnt it, or learned it badly, in their early educational years” [7. P. 5].

Considering all the above mentioned facts we could conclude that the knowledge of English today is an essential skill and in order to be understood all over the world one has to study English. In fact, the most qualified language training can be obtained at the university level, the improvement of the English teaching system in the university being provided by the type of a university, needs analysis, educational standard and normative documents executed in the frames of Bologna process but only on condition of their dynamic interrelation.

The Aims of Research. The aims of *professionally-oriented English training* are characterized by a backbone feature and represent a perspective on the one hand, and the result, on the other hand, and should be considered in terms of general educational goals. The process of education is supposed to provide favorable conditions for switching to self-training, self-education and creative personality development. Accurate and well-ordered organization of the aims of professionally-oriented English training in a university allows everybody who is involved in the teaching and educational process, firstly, to focus on the essence and set the problems of high importance, to see the perspectives; secondly, to support the transparency and publicity in students and teachers' mutual cooperation; thirdly, to get an idea about the criteria of progress assessment simultaneously providing its trustworthiness.

As a matter of fact, the majority of Russian first year students speak English at the elementary level and even worse than that, since most students haven't ever had a chance to travel or go on any immersion programs abroad. Thus, we cannot call them ideal bilinguals since an ideal or balanced bilingual is defined as “someone who speaks each language ... as proficiently as an educated native speaker” [3. P. 7]. Therefore, “English coaches in Russia nowadays tend to teach the basics of cross-cultural communication along with grammar, syntaxes and *English for occupational purposes*” [6. P. 73]. Thus, one of the educational aims in the Russian university is to form students' *cross-cultural and linguistic competence*. Socio-cultural approach to language teaching is closely connected with the use of foreign language as a means of exploring the world and national cultures, an intellectual heritage of English-speaking countries and their people, as well as a tool of overcoming cross-cultural misunderstandings. As Jennifer Jenkins states in her book “English as a Lingua Franca”: “The acquisition of a native-like

accent is no longer the ultimate objective of the majority of learners, nor is communication with native speakers their primary motivation for learning English. Instead, what they need above all is to be able to communicate successfully with other non-native speakers of English from different backgrounds” [9. P. 2]. As a result, teaching *communication competence* in English is implemented in the course of cross-cultural dialogue based on the socio-cultural perception of the world not necessarily dealing with exclusively English speaking countries.

The particular feature of the modern epoch is the yearly accelerating rate of new information technologies. These changes directly influence the sphere of education resulting in new requirements for its contents. The application of the computer gives an opportunity not only to increase the efficiency of studies but also motivates the students to further English self-learning. Our experience of working at Ivanovo State Power University shows that there is an urgent need for using information technologies in teaching English, as the application of the Internet (English websites and social networks), classroom equipment (interactive white boards, OHPs) and a great variety of modern gargets (i-pads, i-pods, laptops, e-books) has become a common practice.

The advantages of the internet technology implementation into the process of English education are obvious and don't require extra proof. In recent years there has been done a lot of research in which linguists describe the positive impact of different forms of *synchronous* and *isochronous* internet communication (e.g. emails, chats, forums, web-conferences, etc.) on the formation of learners' communication competence. The internet resources are an extremely valuable basis for the creation of info media, the conditions favorable for education and self-training, as well as the realization of personal interests and needs. The economical development of the Russian Federation is gradually making the Internet the daily routine for the majority of Russian students.

Methods. Access to the internet resources does not guarantee a prompt and quality language education, because students of the 21st century need to develop essential digital literacy skills. Despite the fact that today's generation is called “homo zap-piens” and “digital natives” due to the ability to use all modern devices easily, we cannot but mention the following critical thinking skills to be acquired for successful education:

- 1) access information efficiently and effectively;

- 2) evaluate information critically and competently;
- 3) use information accurately and creatively;
- 4) apply media resources for learning;
- 5) create media products (videos, podcasts, websites, Power Point Presentations);
- 6) use technology as a tool for research, organization, evaluation and communication;
- 7) apply digital technologies, communication tools, social networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create information;
- 8) use fundamental understanding of ethical legal issues.

In the scientific theory and practice there are a lot of examples of false or incorrectly organized students' work with the Internet resources from the methodological perspective, which results in forming erroneous stereotypes and ideas about the specifics of the English speaking world and, moreover, spreading ideas of racism and xenophobia. Therefore, at the current point of language education when the innovative technologies are being applied "there is an urgent need for the design of the educational internet resources meeting all the requirements and aiming directly at the integrated formation and development of several foreign language *communicative skills*" [4. P. 28], which are namely the following:

- search and select, generalize, classify, analyze and synthesize the data obtained;
- represent and discuss the results of the internet analysis performed;
- educate and self-educate while getting acquainted with cultural and historical heritage of various countries and peoples;
- represent the native culture, country, city, town or settlement when abroad;
- use the internet resources for personal interests and needs, etc.

All the above mentioned facts encouraged the authors of this article for the creation of innovative *International Studies Project (ISP)* devoted to cross-cultural studies for training students' communicative competence and learning English for professional purposes. This resource has been designed for the students of all the departments and specialties of IS-PU. The effectiveness of the project lies in the implementation of the new forms of language education via the application of modern information technologies, in the increase of students' humanitarian training within the framework of the humanization process at the technical university, as well as in the improvement of cross-cultural linguistic competence and in the intensification of English-learning motivation.

Results and Discussion. Since *International Studies* is one of the issues in the Russian Government Educational Standard for teaching Foreign Languages, the authors of the project included the main cultural facts about the Commonwealth of Nations and five English speaking countries (the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), quizzes with keys for self-control and tests to be done in the classroom. Moreover, the above mentioned *ISP* contains the English Speaking World in Pictures section with the photos of famous personalities, places of interest and national symbols. The students who have the best preliminary *ISP* test results are invited to take part in *the Guide to the English Speaking World Contest* which was held between the students of all the departments during the period between 2008 – 2013. The competition is a team game consisting of four main stages, the Captains' Contest and the Map Contest. Generally, there are four or five teams of about twenty students within every group. The spectators are also the students who are involved in the process and are given a special task to be solved within the frame of the competition.

The four main stages of the competition include the following aspects:

- geography, history and the traditions of English speaking countries (Stage One);
- national symbols and descriptors (Stage Two);
- places of interest, famous people and national cuisine (Stage Three);
- national anthems, singers and composers (Stage Four).

The amount of correct answers given by each team is traced down and summed up at the end of each stage by the Jury. The latter is represented by the most experienced professors of the Foreign Languages Department. On evaluating the results the Jury board announces the winners of the Captains' Contest and the Map Contest and the team-winner.

Judging by the previous experience, the preparation for the written test as well as for the *Guide to the English Speaking World Contest* is of great interest to the students. It is a well-known fact that English speaking culture attracts the attention of the younger generations and is widely presented in different sources. However, some of these materials are not always reliable and competent enough due to their excessive complexity for the students (bad structuring of tasks, lack of appropriate linguistic methods of presenting the data, etc.). As for *the ISP* designed at ISPU (www.ispu.ru), there have been employed a number of didactic steps in introducing the material: easy format of presentation, succinct format

and brief spirited summary of the articles, as well as visualization provided by the use of visual methods, namely, pictures. All the above mentioned reasons make this resource an effective means of cross-cultural education for all English learners and can be used in all non-English speaking countries all over the world.

Conclusions. It goes without saying that in the present day situation every professional is supposed to have not only occupational skills, but also the ability to communicate in another language with a foreign partner paying attention to the cultural assumptions and specifics of the overseas mentality. In order to avoid confusing situations when cooperating with foreign partners it is necessary to establish friendly, effective and long-term relationship which can be mutually profitable. Hence, any professional should be well aware of cultural peculiarities of the language along with grammar, vocabulary and phonetics of the target language. Furthermore, language competence is a part and parcel of building cross-cultural bridges between various countries and nationalities.

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