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Integrative Approach to Enhancing Linguists' Background Knowledge in Culture and Art

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Abstract

In the conditions of the global cultural and educational space development, the humanity enjoys such ongoing processes as integration of knowledge, mutual influence and interaction of cultural traditions. Here the role of a translator/ interpreter as an ambassador of culture is growing; he/she is seen as a mediator between communicants belonging to different cultures with incompatible linguistic and conceptual pictures of the world. In this context, the translator's background knowledge in various spheres plays a special role. The search for effective ways of enhancing background knowledge in Culture and Art is an urgent problem of the professional education of a translator/ interpreter. The article deals with the formation of background knowledge of the future translators/ interpreters in Culture and Art in the context of integration of Culture Study and Linguistics courses. The authors show the role of the integrative approach in the process, introduce an original and already tested strategic approach to the formation of the background knowledge of future linguists, allowing to fruitfully integrate linguistic and cultural knowledge as well integrative competences in the university training of future translators/ interpreters. The original definition of the concept, the structure of background knowledge in Culture and Art is revealed, the dominants of background linguocultural knowledge are identified, contributing to comprehension of mentality, system of values and characteristics of the cultural world of the target country and language, ensuring the enculturation and socialization of the translator/ interpreter's personality.

Keywords: Linguistics, Student, Integrative approach, Background knowledge, Education.

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Introduction

In the rapidly changing modern multicultural world, in which the importance of learning foreign languages as means of communication has increased, an interest in the phenomenon of culture also gains recognition, since it is with culture that true communication and understanding between people and peoples begins (Ter-Minasova, 2000).

To fit into the modern society and freely navigate in the information-semantic, symbolic and cultural-linguistic space, a competent linguist is to acquire a systemic cultural thinking. The understanding of the complex and multifaceted axiological framework of the culture of the target country on the basis of interdisciplinary, integrative, competence approach is the way to personal development and professional competence of the future linguist, his/her cross-disciplinary professional mobility (Olvera-Lobo et al., 2005; Cozma, 2012).

The problem of enhancing the background knowledge in Culture and Art is relevant for a number of reasons: 1) it allows to empirically prove the necessity and importance of extending background knowledge as an important component of the general linguistic competence of the modern translator/ interpreter, in which the culturological component plays a special role; 2) it provides for understanding the phenomenon of culture and art as a special information space that determines and influences a number of processes in the modern language; 3) it is important to determine the structure and composition of background knowledge in the field of Culture and Art.

Background knowledge is of interest to various academic disciplines, such as Culture Study, Political Science, Diplomacy, Linguistics, Sociology, etc. so the phenomenon of background knowledge has no unambiguous interpretation among researchers (Gafiyatova & Pomortseva, 2016).

In this study, background knowledge is examined from the point of view of Linguistics and Culture Study. So we define '*background knowledge*' as cultural information included in individual experience, containing a set of universal and nationally specific knowledge about culture (knowledge of the language of Culture and Art, cultural picture of the world, norms and values, signs and symbols, meanings, codes and universals of culture), mastered and reflected in the language, allowing communicants to correctly navigate in the space of culture and creating conditions for effective cross-cultural communication.

This leads the authors to generating the *structure of background knowledge* in Culture and Art, which besides historical background includes conceptual and categorical framework of background knowledge in Culture and Art as well as knowledge of: - morphology, sociology and typology of culture; - cultural heritage and modern culture; - socio-cultural dominants of

every epoch; - peculiarities of English culture and art; - specific works of art and their creators and carriers of culture of each historical epoch; - creative methods and styles; - genre peculiarities of works of Art; - semiological knowledge, including artistic semiotics.

The authors also agree with V. P. Konetskaya and distinguish the following realities in background knowledge: reality-object, reality-concept, reality of the word (Konetskaya, 1980).

Studying into the peculiarities of the formation of background knowledge in Culture and Art in the modern conditions of changing the strategy of translator/ interpreter's personal development and understanding the problem posed, we relied on the following theoretical and methodological basis: the fundamentals of Linguo-culturology and Semiotics (Saussure, 2000), ideas of language and culture integration (Ter-Minasova, 2000), competence-based, culturological approaches to education (Solovyova et al., 2015; Solovyova & Pomortseva, 2015a; Solovyova & Pomortseva, 2015b; Solovyova et al., 2016). We also tackled the issues connected with the background knowledge phenomenon (Gafiyatova & Pomortseva, 2016), Country Study and Theory of Cross-cultural Communication (Ter-Minasova, 2000), Theory of Translation (Komissarov, 1990; Vinogradov, 2006).

One of the most important methodological foundations of the modern educational process is integration, which plays a particular role in training a translator/ interpreter of the XXI century (Solovyova & Pomortseva, 2015a; Solovyova & Pomortseva, 2015b). It reflects the process of combining Linguistics and Culture Study disciplines in solving various problems to ensure the integrity of knowledge in Culture and Art, aimed at the formation of a person with socially significant qualities (Solovyova & Pomortseva, 2015b; Solovyova et al., 2016).

Materials and Methods

Having made an insight into the theoretical aspects on lack of background knowledge to properly build the translating/ interpreting competence of the linguist as well as translation process and teaching methods the authors are to justify their argument from the practical point of view.

2.1 Research Objectives and Methods

The authors' profound experience of teaching academic disciplines within the frame of Linguistics and Culture Study, as well as an empirical study have revealed a rather low level of general intelligence and background knowledge in Culture and Art of would-be translators/ interpreters.

Here the problem arises: how to ensure the preparation of competent translators/ interpreters who are able to understand and realize in their career the interrelation between language and culture, which has become a determining factor in the process of mastering knowledge, forming competences and socializing of the future professional, capable of full cross-cultural interaction in a modern multicultural world?

Obviously, solving this problem requires an *integrative approach*, because difficulties in translation are most often due not to a poor command of a foreign language, but to the lack of the necessary background knowledge, the ability to adapt the original text to the requirements of the recipient, taking into account differences in the system of background knowledge of different peoples and skills to interpret the information accordingly.

The purpose of this study is to identify the peculiarities of enhancing background knowledge in Culture and Art in the context of an integrative approach that allows to fruitfully integrate Culture Study and Linguistics disciplines in the system of university training of future translators/ interpreters so that the timely corrections could be made in the organization of their academic curriculum.

To provide well-grounded conclusions on the status of the problem at the Higher School of Foreign Languages and Translation, Kazan Federal University, the following *theoretical and practical methods* were applied to achieve the solution of the research problem: analysis of the basic concepts and theories of Linguistics and Culture Study as applied to background knowledge; conceptual analysis of framework of Country Study and Culture Study; observation, interviewing, collecting, analyzing and synthesizing data.

2.2 Participants

The research featured approximately 120 first-year students of Kazan Federal University, the Russian Federation. The representativeness of the results is explicitly acknowledged by the fact that the survey was conducted among the students of the Higher School of Foreign Languages and Translation majoring in Linguistics, specializing in Translation/ Interpretation. The majority of the respondents (94%) represent 18-19-year-old age group, 3% are 20-21 years old, 1% of the respondents aged 17-18. As for the gender composition the target group is represented by 85% female and 15% male respondents.

2.3 Instruments

The respondents were offered to take a standardized English-Russian vocabulary translation test. It contained 50 items including Proper Names, terms and realia that covered a wide range of issues in British Country Study and History of Art. Traditionally, such tasks have the

advantage of the answers given by the respondents to be easily compared and assessed. However, in our case the students were asked to provide comment on each of the translated item so that their extended background knowledge of the problems could be registered. The test provided an extensive verbal expression resulting in sufficient information output. This allowed to register the actual level of the students' background knowledge and determine the source of the translation failure as well as the fast-track to their correction.

The test was crowned with the survey question asking the participants to point out their spheres of challenge, i.e. the part of the test where they faced the major difficulty in interpreting the suggested items.

Results and Discussion

The test results showed that the first year students (Group 1) who had completed an extensive interactive course in British Country Study (lectures, practice classes backed by Distance Learning Resource) can relatively well cope with the translation of the items relating to History of Britain. On average they managed to correctly translate 88% of the historical Proper Names and realia offered.

However, they demonstrated a considerable difficulty in translating and commenting on the issues that are mainly referred to Culture Study. The challenges they met were the following (ranged in descending order):

- 1) Religion – *Anglicanism, the Holy Sepulcher, St. George, Dissolution of Monasteries, ecclesiastic*, etc.
- 2) Theater – *Sarah Siddons, the masque (as a genre), The Globe*, etc.
- 3) Pictorial Art – *John Constable, foreground, Green Frog Service*, etc.
- 4) Architecture – *Inigo Jones, Restoration House Style, Christopher Wren*, etc.
- 5) Literature – *Geoffrey Chaucer, “Sheep devour people”*, etc.

These were accompanied by the some translating challenges which stemmed out of insufficient background knowledge and a tendency to overestimate the role of the context in translation (ranged in descending order):

- 1) Translator's false friends – *the Pope, King James, the Globe*.
- 2) Word for word translation – *The Marriage a-la-Mode, The Dissolution of the Monasteries*, etc.

3) Phonetic mimicry – *Black Death* as ‘gubonnaya chuma’ instead of ‘bubunnaya chuma’; *Puritans* as ‘puritantsi’ instead of ‘puritanye’, etc.

It should be mentioned that the survey results mostly corresponded to these findings, i.e. the students again admitted a desperate need for improving their background knowledge in the above mentioned spheres (Karasik et al., 2016).

The situation slightly differed with *the second year students* (Group 2) who took a conventional Culture Study course (lectures and seminars) delivered by a Russian speaking professor with a high record in the field. They showed a better performance of the task, reducing the average percentage of the mistakes made in the translation and interpretation by 19%.

But we cannot emphasize the considerable difference between the results of those *second year students* (Group 3) who completed a pilot integrated British Culture Study course based on *the Manual* created and introduced by the authors of the article and the rest of the respondents. Not only a mere drop in irrelevant translation made by the third student group (by approx. 52% of the numbers counted) but a profound relevant commentary provided on each and every item of the test justify all the efforts made by the authors and speak in favor of the integrated approach to enhancing would-be linguists’ background knowledge in Culture and Art.

Integrative approach is aimed at expanding and deepening the background knowledge of students in Culture and Art, forming the axiological components of the professional activity of the future linguist, able to comprehend the mentality and culture, reflected in the mirror of the arts on the basis of independent thinking and creativity. In this regard, the authors had developed a strategic integrative approach to enhancing the background knowledge that provides for:

1) viewing mentality in the typological and national dimension of culture, reflected in the mirror of the arts; 2) acquiring the system of cultural codes that allows to penetrate into the semantic level of English culture; 3) learning to analyse and interpret texts in Culture and Art; 4) familiarizing themselves with the greatest masters and works of English art; 5) compiling a glossary to express the conceptual framework, mastering the vocabulary crucial for translation in Culture and Art; 6) the integration of ‘natural’ (Russian, English) and ‘artistic languages’ (architecture, painting, music, theater, etc), which allows one to master the language of art, to develop skills to understand the content of various cultural forms, styles and consider language as part of culture (Bracaj, 2015; Scott-Tennent & Gonzalez, 2008); 7) generating a system of exercises to contribute to the formation of lexical and grammatical skills, oral and

written skills based on the reinforcement of active vocabulary, building linguistic and cultural thinking, cross-cultural competences; 8) designing a integrative *Manual*, containing all the above-mentioned positions, to integrate and systematize the background knowledge and; each part of the *Manual* provides materials on socio-cultural background of the epoch, on the peculiarities of English culture and art, outstanding works of art and their creators to gain systemic background knowledge of the epoch with its creative methods and styles, genre and national identity (Solovyova & Pomortseva, 2017); 9) applying the cross-disciplinary integration of linguistic and cultural knowledge in the selection of innovative technologies aimed at the formation of integrative background knowledge, general cultural, social, personal and professional competencies.

Conclusion

Conclusions on the results of the study have both theoretical and practical implications.

The theoretical significance of the research is that the definition of the concept is proposed and the structure of background knowledge in Culture and Art is identified, taking into account the integration of linguistic and cultural differences, a strategic approach is developed to enhancing background knowledge of future translators/ interpreters.

The scientific novelty of the research is that the phenomenon of background knowledge is considered in the context of integrative approach, which allows to fruitfully integrate Culture Study and Linguistics academic courses.

The practical implications of the research lie in the fact that its results are aimed at improving the vocational training of future translators/ interpreters.

The proposed approach to enhancing the background knowledge in Culture and Art will help to more systematically select the material for academic training of would-be linguists. The results of this study can also be used to develop criteria for assessing the competence of translators/ interpreters.

The results of experimental work have been successfully introduced into the practice of professional training of students majoring in Linguistics at Kazan Federal University and can be applied in the training of translators for professional work worldwide.

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