

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

Textbooks on Foreign Literature as a Means of Students' Linguocultural Competence Building

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Abstract

The article dwells on the concept of linguocultural competence and methods of fostering it through teaching foreign literature in higher educational institutions. Considering “competence” to be an individual’s ability to gain knowledge, skills and experience enabling them to act effectively in a professional situation, the authors state that a translator/interpreter’s key competence seems to lie at the intersection of linguistics and culture. The aim is to shed light on *linguocultural competence* as cultural knowledge embodied in a particular language, on cultural semantics and the ability to apply appropriate lexical and stylistic items in situations of multilingual communication. To do so, a translator/interpreter will require a good understanding of common norms, rules and traditions within a language community; sufficient linguistic and culture-bound knowledge updated on a lifelong basis; ability, skills and motivation to ponder over values and attitudes applicable to a given culture. The problem of developing a would-be translators/interpreters’ linguocultural competence is of high relevance as it has not been studied in detail yet and previous research can only be seen as first steps towards designing viable methods. The authors reflect on their practical experience of creating textbooks on English literature and using them in class to ensure linguocultural competence development. The outcome of the research is the proposed structure for a foreign literature textbook that includes various types of linguistic and literary analysis – componential, stylistic, intertextual, and others. The results obtained might be beneficial for practicing university teachers as well as students engaged in independent linguocultural competence building.

Keywords: English literature textbooks, linguocultural competence, foreign literature.

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Introduction

Language reflects all the changes that have happened in the country: in politics, economy, history, society, religion and definitely in culture. Mastering a foreign language requires not only knowing peculiarities of the language in question, its grammar, lexicology, phonetics, word structure and collocations. It also demands abilities and skills to structure a conceptual worldview encompassing a nation's collective knowledge and attitudes, to build the taxonomy of national values and anti-values as well as identify axiological aspects of a foreign culture. For students majoring in Linguistics and Translation Studies it is of vital importance to interact appropriately and achieve mutual understanding with representatives of other linguistic and cultural societies drawing upon knowledge about the world and culture coded in semantics of each national language and represented by different language means.

The widespread term *competence* refers to the ability of an individual to perform any activity on the basis of accumulated life experience and acquired knowledge and skills. Pedagogical literature on language teaching distinguishes between what seems to be too many types of language-related competences – grammatical, lexical, phonological, discursive, pragmatic, communicative, general linguistic or language competence, sociocultural competence, sometimes with addition of wider humanitarian competence and technical competence (Azimov & Shchukin, 2009) – while in practice the list could be easily limited to just two most essential types. To give students a profound understanding of a foreign language and provide them with key professional skills mentioned in the previous passage, linguistic faculties should seek to foster *linguistic competence*, often defined as the system of purely linguistic knowledge possessed by native speakers of a language (Paradis, 2003), and *linguocultural competence*, the knowledge of how a nation's worldview and system of cultural values are manifested in their language (Vorobyov, 2008). For this purpose, any language study, including translation theory and practice, is expected to explore various interactions between language and culture, which is best achieved with the help of authentic sources of cultural information, such as classic and contemporary literature.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of the article is to determine a possible structure of textbooks on foreign literature as a means of linguocultural competence building.

The objectives are:

- to dwell on present-day understanding of linguocultural competence and the methods of building it;

- to outline a possible structure for a foreign literature textbook as a means of linguocultural competence building;
- to provide examples of contents of the textbook aligned with its structure.

Literature review

Linguocultural competence and its role in teaching foreign languages is studied by a substantive number of Russian authors, including Stepanov (Stepanov, 1997), Teliya (Teliya, 2004), Baukina and Bushukina (Baukina & Bushukina, 2019), Maslova (Maslova, 2004), Krasnykh (Krasnykh, 2011). However, it is still unclear how much *linguocultural competence*, the term proposed by Vorobyov (Vorobyov, 2008) and Teliya (Teliya, 2004), is synonymous with rather similar terms *intercultural competence* and *cultural competence*. There is a strong feeling that the latter two have been borrowed from English-language literature and introduced into Russian educational discourse with little concern about their potential interchangeability with the former one. Thus, both *linguocultural competence* and *intercultural competence* happen to be utilized indiscriminately in Russian-language papers on language teaching and often get confused along the way. For example, Abdylmanova and Novikova (Abdylmanova & Novikova, 2018) write on “forming intercultural competence” as an essential part of foreign language training, when Podgorbunskikh and Suvorova (Podgorbunskikh & Suvorova, 2017) mention “linguocultural competence” as the prime indicator to assess the quality of education provided by higher educational establishments and the key means of “internationalizing educational activities and creating innovative multicultural environment”. To our understanding, intercultural or cultural competence is a rather vague term used in ethnic and sociological studies to describe a set of skills and abilities related to understanding and respect for other people’s cultures, worldviews and communication styles, willingness to acknowledge and accept different ideas and behaviours in a nonjudgmental way as well as respond in a culturally appropriate manner. Hence, as intercultural competence lacks a linguistic component and focuses more on cognitive and behavior skills, the term linguocultural competence is a much better fit for situations when a person is supposed to take on a role of mediator in cross-cultural communication. Many Russian authors recognize linguocultural competence as the key component in foreign language teaching, as seen in works by Abdylmanova and Novikova (Abdylmanova & Novikova, 2018) and Korneeva (Korneeva, 2016); while methods of assessing linguocultural competence of students majoring in Linguistics and Intercultural Communications are investigated by Shanina (Shanina, 2016), Gushina and Shanina (Gushina & Shanina, 2016), Baykina and Bashukina (Baykina & Bashukina, 2019).

Linguocultural approach to teaching foreign languages considers language as a carrier of culture, so the knowledge of culture comes from language and systems of national-cultural concepts coded in it.

Mastering a foreign language, students begin to experience and understand how the world is differently structured and conceptualized in different cultures and language groups – age-related, social, ethnic, professional, etc. According to some researchers, a great opportunity to expand that knowledge and build strong linguocultural competence would be analyzing foreign literature in classroom. Gómez (2012), Crystal (2011) and Pugachev (2011) propose fostering *intercultural communicative competence* through reading and discussing authentic literary texts. Intercultural content of foreign language textbooks, as reflected in their concept, texts and exercises, is researched by Tareva, Schepilova and Tarev (2017). However, little, if anything, is said about the requirements to the structure of textbooks and manuals on foreign literature that would help ensure creation of linguocultural competence, so this topic requires further investigation.

The authors of the present study believe that sufficient linguocultural competence might be shaped by including different types of linguistic and literary analysis into textbooks on foreign literature, such as stylistic analysis, plot and character motivation analysis, conceptual analysis, intertextual analysis, biographical analysis, distribution analysis and componential analysis. To illustrate a possible structure of such a textbook the article features samples from the two manuals, *Textbook on Pygmalion* by B. Shaw published in 2019 and *Textbook on A Week in December* by S. Faulks published in 2020, by associate professors of Moscow City University. The choice of the classical play *Pygmalion* by B. Shaw and the modern novel *A Week in December* by S. Faulks will hopefully provide more variety for practicing teachers and professors in terms of choosing a literary work to bring up in class as well as help them develop their own sets of activities and exercises.

Methodology

The article is the distillation of the authors' own practical experience of teaching foreign literature to students majoring in Linguistics and Translation Studies at Moscow City Pedagogical University. As the students are supposed to work as translators and interpreters upon graduation, their foreign literature course is expected to advance their text analysis and communication skills rather than familiarize them with the vast catalogue of British and American literature, so the authors would create their own textbooks and manuals that best suit the purpose of making students more sensitive to the meaning of the written word and help them see fiction texts as a means of digging in a foreign culture. To compose the article, the authors began with collecting and analyzing relevant theoretical information on linguocultural competence in the field of foreign language teaching which led them to the conclusion that some Russian authors fail to see the difference between the sociological term *intercultural competence* and the purely linguistic term *linguocultural competence*. The next step was to outline and specify the notion of linguocultural

competence, its role in linguistic education and methods and prospects of creating this competence in students during foreign language classes.

The following step was to define the role of reading authentic literary texts in competence building, present fiction texts as linguocultural didactic units and list literary and semantic analysis techniques that appear to be instrumental in developing linguocultural competence if included in a foreign literature textbook.

The final step is to provide a detailed account on the structure of the textbooks *Pygmalion* by B. Shaw (2019) and *A Week in December* by S. Faulks (2020) composed and used by the authors in their teaching practice and comment on how a certain structure can put an emphasis on cultural rather than imaginative experience coming from an artistic work.

Results

As mentioned earlier, linguocultural competence is supposed to be distinguished from the sociological phenomenon of *intercultural competence* and observed at the intersection of linguistics and culture studies. In the present paper *linguocultural competence* is understood as the ability and readiness to form, expand and maintain a foreign-language picture of the world, to accumulate, analyze and employ vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and key texts that reflect the collective consciousness of native speakers. The importance of linguocultural competence development in students mastering foreign languages and translation techniques cannot be overestimated. Would-be translators and interpreters should be encouraged to go beyond basic linguistic and cultural knowledge into reflecting over values and norms applicable to a given culture and language and fathom various rules and traditions existing within a language community and around the world.

Linguocultural competence enables students to better understand and respect common behavioral patterns, ways of thinking and rules of verbal and non-verbal communication within both their own socio-ethnic community and a foreign one. It arms them with skills required to interact with representatives of other linguocultural societies while knowledge about the world processed and stored in the form of concepts and channeled through language units helps build cognitive foundations of communication. Linguocultural competence, based on language proficiency and cultural knowledge, is likely to boost students' intercultural competence as well – their tolerance and respect towards different value systems – providing more opportunities to become sought-after professionals on the globalized labour market.

The authors agree with Korneeva (2016) that the most effective method of building linguocultural competence is to engage students in reading and analyzing authentic texts, foreign literature in particular.

However, we argue that not all types of text analysis from those existing within the realm of literature studies and linguistics are suitable for the task, so the priority should be given to the ones listed below.

Motivation behind the plot. This analysis is aimed at determining the motivating factors driving key events and interactions happening in a work of fiction. This technique allows decomposing a single text into semantically integral, conceptually connected fragments – subplots and motives. As the result, students are able to identify recurrent themes, character types, conflicts, behavioral patterns, tropes and motives, accumulating culture- and language-specific information.

Intertextual analysis serves to determine the vertical context behind the text. Culture-wise, this type of analysis greatly contributes to constructing the axiological matrix of a particular culture at a certain stage of its development and seeing axiological labels being attached to its artefacts. The study of intertextual links within a literary text – allusions, quotes, epigraphs, case names and texts, etc. – outlines a complex system of social standards and expectations, role models and figures of authority, ideals and ideologies characteristic of a certain period in the life of a nation.

Biographical analysis is a technique to reconstruct the spirit of the era portrayed in a literary text by exploring the life of its author. Every text is marked with the author's reminiscences, either explicit or implicit, about his or her life experience and worldview. As postulated in hermeneutics, to envision the whole of reality one can study its parts, such as the detailed experience of everyday existence by an individual. In that respect, the author of a foreign-language fiction work might be treated as a valid representative of his or her culture, and facts from his or her biography help interpret the cultural meaning of the text.

Conceptual analysis aims to detect key concepts of the literary text. Though a fiction work is expected to reflect its author's personal view of the world and value system, it might as well channel general concepts with invariant cultural meaning and the nation's collective mentality.

Stylistic analysis serves to establish stylistic means that most contribute to getting the message across and presenting the main idea. In the cultural aspect, stylistic analysis is predominantly an additional type of analysis employed to identify the mood, tonality and cultural and emotional connotations the text carries along.

Distribution analysis is a type of semantic analysis that pays close attention to collocations featured in a literary text – clusters of words that co-occur more often than would be expected by chance. Collocations may vary greatly from language to language, meaning they are culture-specific, thus knowledge of fixed

collocations is vital for understanding the language picture of the world.

Component analysis is another example of semantic analysis done by breaking word definitions featured in dictionaries into minimal semantic components. The method helps determine cultural connotations assigned to words and expressions under study and notice differences between the volume of semantic domains in different languages.

To make sure all these seven types of literary and linguistic analysis will be employed by the students and help them eventually develop linguocultural competence, the structure of textbooks and manuals on foreign literature may take on the patterns described below. The examples are taken from the textbooks on *Pygmalion* by B. Shaw and *A Week in December* by S. Faulks published in 2019 and 2020 respectively.

The *Textbook on Pygmalion by B. Shaw (2019)* starts with Introduction on *HOW TO ORGANIZE THE WORK ON THE BOOK WITH THE HELP OF THE TEXTBOOK*, meant to give teachers and students the idea of how the manual might be used to help gain essential cultural knowledge in the process of reading. The opening part, *GEORGE BERNARD SHAW. BIOGRAPHY OUTLINE* contains a few facts about the author as well as asks questions designed to make students conduct some independent research, including:

1. *What made G.B. Shaw a distinguished writer?*
2. *What is known about Bernard Shaw's origin?*
3. *Name best known G.B. Shaw's plays.*
4. *What prestigious cinema award was given to Bernard Show?*

This section is an attempt on biographical analysis giving students a chance to learn more about the author, his views and attitudes, to help them better understand characters' intentions and motivations behind the plot.

The next part *THE MYTH OF PYGMALION* presents several versions of the myth of Pygmalion and moots questions like:

1. *Are any other myths about Pygmalion? Comment on the differences between them and the ones you've just read.*
2. *Read the Christian Creation Story. How does it relate to the divine theory?*

As the result, students are encouraged to rely on elements of conceptual and intertextual analysis in order to see intertextual links connecting Shaw's play to the ancient story from the Greek mythology as well as key concepts explored in both texts.

The part *THE STUDY OF PHONETICS* features a brief memo on phonetics as a branch of linguistics that studies sounds of human languages and its cultural significance. To initiate a discussion and send students to dig for culture-specific information, some questions are introduced:

1. *Are proper grammar and pronunciation of great value today?*
2. *What makes a lady and a gentleman – language, clothes or manners?*
3. *Actors spend considerable time on speech training, and several books have been written on the subject. Find some vocal warm-ups and exercises and demonstrate them.*
4. *What is known about the prototype of Professor Higgins – linguist Henry Sweet?*
5. *What other outstanding linguists specializing in Phonology and Phonetics do you know?*

The main body of the manual goes as follows:

- *PYGMALION*
- *ACT 1*
- *ACT 2 (PART 1)*
- *ACT 2 (PART 2)*
- *ACT 3 (PART 1)*
- *ACT 3 (PART 2)*
- *ACT 4*
- *ACT 5*

There are tasks for every act of the play. The *Textbook on Pygmalion by B. Shaw* (2019) assumes the division of tasks into three difficulty levels – section A contains the easiest tasks, section C has the most challenging ones – with linguocultural competence formation and development tasks present at every level. Tasks for every act follow the same pattern. Every act starts with the exercise meant to draw students' attention to the most important facts, event or plot details:

Read the act thoroughly looking up unknown words and paying special attention to the description of the main characters:

- *the Flower girl (Eliza Doolittle: her appearance, clothes, way of living, speech, some features of character, manners);*
- *the Gentleman (Colonel Pickering: his appearance, clothes, manners, attitude to people, profession);*
- *the Note Taker (Henry Higgins: his looks, speech, some features of character, attitude to people, profession).*

Section A includes the following tasks:

1. *Translate the following active words and word combinations.*
2. *Make up micro situations with the active vocabulary above (based on the text).*
3. *Find the following word combinations in the text.*
4. *Find the lines proving the following and read them out.*
5. *Make up a list of words and word combinations to characterize the protagonists.*
6. *Make up a plan of the act using the active vocabulary.*
7. *Learn by heart from: the Gentleman: "How do you do it..." up to: the Note taker: "...and don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon" and get ready to present the extract.*

Section B presents the tasks:

1. *Explain the meaning of the following sentences.*
2. *Read out the text from the words: "the Gentleman: (returning to his former place)..." up to the words: "the Note taker: ... which requires better English" after listening to the recording. What is the main idea of the extract?*
3. *Reproduce the situation from the play using the following idioms.*
4. *Make up a character sketch of one of the characters.*

Section C includes tasks like:

1. *Think over the situations and questions and get ready to express your own point of view.*
2. *Assume one of the roles (the Flower girl, the Gentleman, the Note taker, a bystander...) and dwell on the events in the act.*
3. *Find additional information concerning (e.g.: Bernard Shaw and his works, Shaw's London, Geographical places, mentioned in the play, John Milton and William Shakespeare. Present one of their poems or sonnets).*

Every act ends with *TEST YOURSELF* section with the tasks like:

- 1 A. *Match the words combinations and phrases from the act.*
 - B. *Make up your own sentences with the vocabulary (both in English and in Russian).*
- 2 A. *Fill in the prepositions in the sentences.*
 - B. *Explain the meaning of the sentences given above.*
- 3 A. *Make up the words. There is an odd letter in each word (for example: 1. s a h l e t r e 2. n l i c o l n i s*

of 3. n k i t c e l 4. i l r b y e t k 5. r a g b c e h).

B. Make up a situation using all the active words given above.

4 A. Translate the situations from Russian into English using the active vocabulary from the act.

B. Make up your own situations using the active vocabulary from the act.

Working on the tasks from all the sections students are expected to rely on elements of plot motivation analysis, distribution analysis, component analysis and stylistic analysis.

The textbook ends with three more parts *TOPICS FOR FINAL DISCUSSION* (Section A, Section B, Section C), *QUESTIONS*, *DRAMATIZING* and two supplements *APPENDIX 1. ACCENT VERSUS DIALECT* and *APPENDIX 2. COCKNEY*.

The structure of the *Textbook on A Week in December by S. Faulks (2020)* has a different structure. Although the Introduction has the same title – *HOW TO ORGANIZE THE WORK ON THE BOOK WITH THE HELP OF THE TEXTBOOK* – it mostly focuses on linguocultural aspects of the book, introducing the term *realia* used to refer to a variety of cultural phenomena and definitions of stylistic devices (*simile, metaphor, allusion, alliteration, consonance, assonance, understatement, etc.*).

The next section *BEFORE READING THE NOVEL* includes questions for discussion, such as:

1. What do you know about the author of the book Sebastian Faulks (life, works...)? What is his influence on British literature?
2. What is known about the creation of the book “A Week in December”? What is its historical context?
3. Dwell on the title of the book. What can a reader expect from the book judging by the title? How will you translate the title? You're your reasons.
4. Analyze the structure of the book and chapter titles.
5. Comment on the covers of the book, quotations, blurbs.
6. Find critical reviews and analyze them.
7. Comment on the epigraphs.

As it takes one week for the plot to unfold, the book is composed of seven parts beginning with *Sunday, December 16* and ending with *Saturday, December 22*. Every day of the week lasts for several chapters (from 3 up to 5). In the textbook, there are tasks for every chapter, covering aspects like:

1. Answer the questions using the vocabulary of the chapter.
2. Assume the role of one of the characters and dwell on the events in the chapter.
3. What *realia* / culture-bound words can be found in the text? What narrative elements can we encounter

to focus almost exclusively on teaching students different types of reading rather than building their linguocultural competence. To complete the tasks, students are expected to engage in search reading (scanning for names, places, dates or facts), familiarization reading (skimming pages to find the required information, for instance, English equivalents to a random list of Russian words or the chain of events happening throughout the chapter) and investigation reading (reading for detail in order to provide answers to a set of questions, to comment on ideas present in the text or take part in a discussion). Additional activities are likely to include making presentations on an author, writing a character study or blurbs to be featured on a hypothetical back cover (see Bogdanova (2011), Kosinskaya (2013), Roslyakova (2015)). Sometimes emphasis is put on the linguistic contents of a story, with tasks on grammar and syntactical structures. To our understanding, using literary works for vocabulary building or any activities other than literary and linguistic analysis might be rather counterproductive, as their best purpose is to help students understand societies, events and cultures.

Textbooks and manuals on foreign literature should prioritize linguocultural competence tasks over language competence tasks, though the latter might be present to some extent. For instance, *Textbook on Pygmalion by B. Shaw* (2019) is designed to develop linguistic skills as well, asking students to translate or explain certain collocations or insert appropriate prepositions, as tasks on vocabulary help employ new words and phrases later on in oral and written speech, whether it's a character study or an essay on the message of the text. The majority of the tasks included teach students to be sensitive to the text itself, commonality and peculiarities of its structure, cultural connotations and allusions, motivations behind characters' actions and specific patterns of their speech, the author's intent.

The tasks from *Textbook on A Week in December by S. Faulks* (2020) mostly deal with literary analysis, encouraging students to pay close attention to minor shifts in tonality expressed in language units, dwell on the purpose of implementing a certain stylistic device, dwell on how time and scape are represented in the narrative, interpret types of conflicts, watch the narrative change its focus and define key language units to work on while translating a passage.

In both manuals, much attention is paid to realia (or culture-bound words) used in the text. Though realia are not frequently met in contemporary literature, they may be found in some descriptive sciences, especially ones with local colour. In translation studies, realia are defined as words and expressions that name culture-specific phenomena spawned by one culture and alien to another (Musina 2017). According to Vlahov and Florin (1971), who first coined the term, literary texts may feature more than five different types of realia: geographical (e.g. geographic objects or names of endemic species), ethnographical (words describing everyday life, culture, measure and currency units), politics and society-related (administrative divisions,

political institutions and their functions, military). Attempts to translate culture-bound words that are often referred to “non-equivalent lexicon” (Fyodorov 2002) motivate students to explore the cultures of English-speaking countries, including societal norms and typical communication patterns, as well as boosts their skills and cultural experience needed to interact with representatives of different linguistic communities.

The tasks where students are asked to do a character study and assess protagonists in terms of their behavior and life choices may help them see certain thinking patterns and attitudes that diverge from what is expected and accepted in their own culture. Students might be instructed to assume a role of one of the characters, define his or her social status and intentions, or dwell on key events from the plot.

All in all, basic information on foreign languages is now freely available on the net and mastering one requires more communication practice than completing exercises from a textbook. However, a quest for linguocultural competence is unlikely to turn successful without proper guidance from a competent teacher who knows that works of classic and contemporary literature may serve as a never-ending source of cultural knowledge.

Conclusion

The main purpose of teaching foreign languages should not be limited to building linguistic competence, especially for students majoring in Translation Studies. As culture-oriented approach in linguistics postulates that language is inseparable from its culture, the priority should be given to linguocultural competence – the ability and skills to see and interpret the meaning of cultural manifestations and successfully communicate in a multicultural society. The term “linguocultural competence” comes from culture-oriented linguistics and should not be confused with the broad sociological term “intercultural competence”.

The main aim of teaching foreign literature in university classroom is to make students aware that any authentic text is likely to feature words and expressions conveying linguistic consciousness and cultural identity of the native-speaking population, and that insufficient background knowledge will eventually result in inadequate translation or failing to be perceived by the interlocutor. However, the problem of developing linguocultural competence in would-be translators and interpreters has not been studied in detail yet, especially on the material of foreign-language fiction and accompanying teaching manuals. Existing textbooks primarily take on the pattern similar to teaching school children to read literature in their native language when the top priority should be given to literary and semantic analysis activities instead to help students see the picture of the world and collective consciousness manifested in language units. Relying on their personal experience, the authors outline two possible structures for textbooks on

English-language literature that incorporate various types of literary and linguistic analysis – componential analysis, distribution analysis, stylistic analysis, intertextual analysis, biographical analysis, plot motivation analysis, conceptual analysis – that will help shape students' linguocultural competence.

The results obtained might be beneficial for practicing teachers and university lecturers as well as students engaged in independent linguocultural competence building.

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