

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

Developing Identity Awareness in the Primary School Textbooks “Dialogue with English”

Olga V. Afanasieva (a), Kseniia M. Baranova (b), Olga G. Chupryna *

(a) *Moscow City University, 129226, Moscow (Russia), 4-1, 2nd Selskokhoziastvenny Proezd*

(b) *Moscow City University, 129226, Moscow (Russia), 4-1, 2nd Selskokhoziastvenny Proezd*

(c) *Moscow City University, 129226, Moscow (Russia), 4-1, 2nd Selskokhoziastvenny Proezd*

ChuprynaOG@mgpu.ru

Abstract

Modern methodology has faced challenges in the field of developing primary school students' awareness of their own identity in the process of learning foreign languages. Globalization has put forward the question how to advance intercultural competence among both school students and educators. Cultural and national awareness is an essential component of foreign language teaching. The article is aimed at revealing the peculiarities of intercultural communication hinged on the interaction of various cultures tracked down in modern foreign language classes. The analysis is based on the new textbooks “Dialogue with English” for 2-4 year schoolchildren. The research focuses on the ways cultural elements and facts of the English-speaking world are compared with the same features in the Russian-speaking community. As a result, it elicits different stages in the pupils' identity formation and development of their sociocultural competence. The authors specify the prerequisites for digital technologies use in teaching English to primary school students.

Keywords: sociocultural competence, dialogue, identity, awareness, school.

© 2021 Olga V. Afanasieva, Kseniia M. Baranova, Olga G. Chupryna

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Published by Moscow City University and peer-reviewed under responsibility of TSNI-2021 (Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity)

Introduction

Cross-cultural communication can be regarded as a new challenge that modern civilization is bound to face. Rethinking primary students education requires stimulating intercultural learning. In 2015 the European Union Education Ministers released the Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of

* Corresponding author. E-mail: ChuprynaOG@mgpu.ru

freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (Briga, 2019). “The process of globalization of the modern world requires effective interaction and communication of representatives of different cultures” (Korneeva, 2017, p.78). Consequently, “in light of globalization and increased cultural diversity, the question of cultural identity becomes particularly salient in many societies today” (Bichler, Albert, Barros, 2020, p. 310). In this aspect the problem of forming students’ national identity is becoming one of the main issues in the process of foreign language teaching (FLT). The term identity which appeared in scientific circulation in the 70s of the 20th century has occupied the leading position within the terminological vocabulary of psychological, sociological and anthropological studies. It also began to be widely used in modern politics (Chupryna, 2016). People’s image of themselves, the way individuals see their place in the extra-linguistic reality and define the system of values relevant for them nowadays is extremely significant. Language in this case seems to be one of the leading factors in the process of formation one’s own identity. People often become aware that they belong to a certain cultural background when they get acquainted with other cultures, when they begin to see values of other people and start to compare them with their own. One of the principles of intercultural education is education for empathy which means “learning to understand others, to put ourselves in their shoes and to regard their beliefs and problems from their own point of view” (Kesidou, 2019, p. 149). The process often begins during primary school years when pupils work on the educational situations offered in foreign language textbooks. While receiving school education, pupils use two or more languages in their discourse, their awareness of national identity being located on the crossroad of the native as well as foreign languages and cultures.

The problem of reflecting the cultural background of the English-speaking countries has always been essential in Russian educational institutions teaching students the English language. This aspect has also been significant in English textbooks for secondary schools as well as for universities. The popular English courses for secondary schools published in Russia in the 20th century offered variegated information about political, economic and cultural life of the English-speaking world, which was absolutely natural, as on the one hand, such were the requirements of the educational standard (Federal State Standard, 2010), and on the other, - it definitely helped the learners to get insight into the world of people whose language they were learning. With time the idea of students’ self-identification became explicitly relevant and educational requirements began to accentuate the fact of students’ development through a foreign language potential. The idea of creating learners’ general cultural background and their ethnic self-identification became essential, indeed. Thus the focus was oriented on the development of students’ national identity. One of the main targets in the process of teaching a foreign language turned into the necessity to develop students’ awareness of their national identification and strengthen their desire to be able to enter intercultural communication. Another target was to facilitate mutual understanding and tolerance between the

participants of the discourse, irrespective of the differences that they might have in their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Such an attitude to foreign cultures could in the end help students to realize their own identity better as well as get to know their national culture, its customs and traditions, perceive the values of their Motherland. As a result the so called cultural instruction in a course of foreign language teaching is important because it “sparks their interest in studying language through culture” (Windham, 2017, p. 81).

At present, the issue of teaching cross-cultural communication is becoming self-evident (Tolosa, Biebricher, 2018). There is no denial that the key to effective cross-cultural communication is the knowledge of a language spoken in the country with the representatives of which students are supposed to interact. New approaches to teaching foreign languages require implementation into the process not only competence and cognitive- communicative approaches but an intercultural approach as well (Baranova, Afanasyeva, 2020). In other words, the ability to join intercultural dialogue is becoming extremely significant as it helps to develop pupils’ awareness of their own national identity which could be achieved through the process of intercultural communication (Tareva, 2019). Naturally, the role of communicative competence in the process of learning English increases. It has become obvious that ‘communication in a foreign language always happens in a larger sociocultural context so that developing “intercultural communicative competence’ should be an essential part of second language teaching” (Euler, 2017, p. 68) It is also worth mentioning that the extra-linguistic reality is constantly changing: on the one hand, new phenomena appear in the world around human beings, some elements of life become outdated or even disappear, on the other – interpretation of objects and events changes, they are given different names, specific attitude towards certain referents from definite strata of the society and from various communities is forged.

The year 2020 has been distinguished by the introduction of a lot of new trends into the life of practically all people living on our planet. Lockdowns used for certain periods of time, on line teaching/learning process made electronic forms of textbooks as well as their supplementary components extremely relevant. All these factors together with numerous innovations in the field of FLT process as well as new school requirements made it a necessity to have a new series of English textbooks that could reflect at least major of them.

Purpose and objectives of the study

In 2020 a new series of textbooks “Dialogue with English” by O.V. Afanasieva, K.M. Baranova, I.V. Miheeva (2020) was published in Russia in the publishing house BINOM, Laboratoriya znaniy that comes

into the group of companies Prosvesheniye. The textbooks of the series are written for a primary stage of schooling (grades 2 - 4) and besides them the course includes the following components: 1) electronic forms of the textbooks 2) teacher's books 3) workbooks 4) audio supplement 5) methodological supplement. The purpose of the study is to reveal the way intercultural approach is reflected in the materials mentioned above and to analyze how the new trends and modern approaches in FLT are realized in this course. We want to make a special emphasis on the development of learners' ability to form their national identity and strengthen it through getting more information about the world around them in various cultures (mainly Russian and the one of the English-speaking world).

Literature review

The English language textbooks published in Russia have always regarded the development of oral communication for students as a core target. Communicative competence was one of the most significant ones though its role varied in different periods of the previous century (see textbooks by S.K. Folomkina, A.P. Starkov, V.P. Kuzovlev, I.N. Verechagina, O.V. Afanasieva, M.Z. Biboletova and others). In all of these courses there were exercises aimed at developing students' skills to produce monologues and to take part in dialogues but intercultural competence was less important until recently. At present there is no doubt about the relevance of teaching English using intercultural communication. These ways of intercultural approach understood as such in modern lingua-didactics put forward the ideas of cultural equality, tolerance, respect for opposite views and opinions. Within this approach the orientation on intercultural differences and common characteristics while teaching students, to be aware of their national identity becomes really relevant and even dominant in the modern process of FLT (Goncharova, 2020). It is necessary to accentuate the role of intercultural dialogue in the paradigm mentioned above. The latter can be defined as "a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect" (Council of Europe, 2008: section 3.1).

In the epoch of globalization an individual's cultural identity is becoming one of the most urgent issues which is directly connected with the process of learning a foreign language through understanding the culture of the people whose language is being learnt. Self-image is in the centre of an individual's personal identity and the cultural identity is created within the binary opposition "the self" – "the other". Thus students should understand their own culture and the culture of a foreign world. Culture in this case is interpreted as a set of rules defining the appropriate behaviour in the society and its values. Comparison of these factors is vitally important. On the one hand students should identify themselves as part of their national culture, and on the other hand, they should accept the values of a foreign culture with tolerance. In

this aspect culture references are becoming significant as they build a link in the cultural continuity “the past – the present”. What is going on today is no less, and, in many cases more important, than what existed in the past (Chupryna, 2016).

In their life all people, and schoolchildren are no exception, encounter diversity of cultures of modern world, which means that inevitably all of us should be able to enter into dialogue with the representatives of foreign cultures, introducing the ideas of corporation. Through this approach even primary pupils should learn to see what can unite people, what helps them to understand each other and live in peace. This approach can give them an opportunity to analyze numerous phenomena in different cultures and develop their own national identity. According to the requirements of the Federal State Standard of Secondary General Education the problem of bringing up a worthy citizen of the Russian Federation should be one of the core issues in foreign language textbooks (Federal State Standard, 2010). While learning English with the help of such textbooks students can become ready to a life in modern competitive multicultural world that is under pressure of numerous quickly changeable processes; they get an expressive and colourful image of their native land and start to realize what can really unite people and contribute to their mutual understanding.

Methodology

The textbooks under study are based on the integrative approach to FLT and offer a lot of tasks of educational, cultural (including cross-cultural) and pragmatic character alongside with developing pupils’ communicative competence which plays the leading role.

Formation of pupils’ own identity becomes strongly enhanced at the beginning of their school life, which seems logical enough. The classes of the Russian language offer a lot of information in this aspect concerning history, geography, literature, cultural life and arts of students’ Motherland. Yet when schoolchildren get certain data about the country whose language they learn, their perception of numerous familiar facts of life in the Russian Federation can be interpreted from a different point of view.

The title of the textbooks under analysis (“Dialogue with English”), especially the word “dialogue” that is incorporated in it, emphasizes the importance of oral speech in the educational process and shows how significant is the place of a dialogue in the new course. Dialogue here is regarded as an inseparable element of the modern multicultural world, as an effective way to understand the extra-linguistic reality and at the same time as one of the most important teaching methods of oral speech. Dialogue is interpreted in a very broad way – it’s certainly a dialogue of cultures (first of all Russian and British, but not only these two), it’s a dialogue of school subjects, various communities, generations etc. Within the topics offered in the

textbooks schoolchildren gain the skill of comparing their own culture with the cultures of the English-speaking world which leads to students' awareness of their national identity.

The new "Dialogue with English" textbooks are a constituent part of the educational system School of Dialogue, whose main issues were created by St. Petersburg school of methodology. The main postulate of this educational system is based on the fact that the variety of cultures in the modern world leads to the necessity to propose diverse ideas of cooperation and to enter into a dialogue to achieve this goal.

The tasks given in the "Dialogue with English" course are aimed at teaching primary students to have dialogues with people of different cultural backgrounds, thus strengthening and making more profound their interest to their own native land, its culture and traditional Russian and British values. The cultural elements of the English-speaking countries are compared with the same phenomena in the life of their Motherland. Consequently, from the early stages of education pupils are involved into the dialogue of cultures, into the dialogue of school subjects. The new "Dialogue with English" textbooks contribute to students' active attitude to life, help them to develop their personal, intellectual and creative potential.

The "Dialogue with English" textbooks are focused on various sources of information. They include verbal texts, different schemes, questionnaires, tables, illustrations, photos, slides. Primary pupils get used to analyze the given information, to transform it from one pattern or form to another. In the end teaching and learning processes in the dialogue format lead students to a certain level of comprehension concerning the appropriate behaviour. The textbooks under analysis offer various educational situations and tasks that provoke learners to realize the necessary moral choice and consequently the appropriate actions and deeds. All these factors help pupils to gain such personal qualities as responsibility and initiative. The received experience of cooperation can help a lot to prevent possible conflict situations in future.

When students are taught the English language through the dialogue of cultures they also develop their cognitive processes that are aimed at the formation of a linguistic worldview which can be seen in the intercultural communication practice (Tareva, 2019). This performance evidently helps them to become more aware of their own national identity and the values of their Motherland.

Results

The textbooks under discussion have been written on the basis of Federal State Standard of Secondary General Education (Federal State Standard, 2010). They completely realize all the requirements for modern FLT process in primary schools in Russia. The course "Dialogue with English" step by step leads to the fulfilment of personal, meta-subject and subject results of the educational process that vastly contributes to

successful generation of the FLT communicative competence. It boosts primary students' ability and their wish to take part in the intercultural communication. In other words, the integrative educational aim in the "Dialogue with English" textbooks is to create pupils' elementary communicative competence in all its complexity which also includes sociocultural competence that is extremely important.

In the second year of schooling primary pupils begin to accept themselves as Russian Federation citizens, they get a more profound idea about the peoples of their Motherland, and their cultures. Simultaneously they become aware of the role that languages play in the process of communication. During the first classes of the English language students get acquainted with the world of their British peers. At this stage they get all explanatory information in Russian. For example, the module "Let's get acquainted" (2d year level) offers the official name of the country whose language they are leaning, tells students about the capital of the country, its state flag and some other symbols. Data from country studies are given in special frames, as well as picturesque photos help the primary students to visualize the Royal Family residence. Doing tasks included into different modules schoolchildren start thinking about various languages that exist in the world and why it is vital to learn them, especially English which is a global language all over the world, which also influences the process of students' thinking development (Bokova, Milovannova, 2019).

The textbooks explain how people should introduce themselves, what is the typical answer to the question "How are you?" etc. Such cultural elements of etiquette character are incorporated into the teaching materials at all levels. In the middle of the first year of learning English pupils get some information about winter holidays typical of Britain and Russia. They get the opportunity to see common traditions and ways of celebrating them and find out different ones. Later they become able to give information about other important holidays of Russia, such as Victory Day, Russia Day. In the module "This is my town and countryside" (3d year level) primary students become aware of how names for many places on the territory of their native country are rendered into English – the names of the cities, seas, mountains, rivers. They also have an opportunity to talk about famous people of their Motherland. Modern schoolchildren should know the names of great Russian writers, poets, scientists, artists of the past as well as their contemporaries. They are to be able to tell their peers about such famous people and also about prominent facts in other spheres of our life. One of the possible ways to preserve and develop national identity could be a careful choice of texts, devoted to the elements of native and foreign cultures. The module "Around Russia and Great Britain" (4th year level) introduces the famous places in both countries including those which have recently come into existence (the London Eye). In the module "Animals and plants around us" of the same textbook students get information about rather new national parks of Russia such as "Leopard Land", "Tiger's Call" and the famous park "Zaryadye" in Moscow. Students also begin to realize the importance of the natural world around them, they get information about the Red Book and the

circumstances that could lead to disappearance of many living creatures and species of animals in various countries. All these innovations can be regarded as a serious step forward in developing students' sociocultural competence.

The project tasks in the analyzed course are also aimed at achieving its main goal in the aspect under study. Thus students are asked to find information about symbols of England, Scotland and Wales and present it under the title "Symbols of Great Britain" (3d year level), or, for example, they are offered to describe the region, city or settlement where schoolchildren live in a few sentences with the appropriate sketches or drawings to illustrate their projects. In the textbooks they are offered references that can help them to fulfill the projects or they can use the Internet and other sources.

Discussions

Development of sociocultural competence in primary school English language teaching requires new approaches to the materials connected with well-known facts of the English-speaking world. New referents that appear in the cultural life of these countries should be reflected in the English textbooks as well as alterations that can be found in the familiar phenomena of Russian and foreign cultural backgrounds. For example, the fact that since 2002 the new name Elizabeth Tower has been used to indicate the tower with the clock (former Clock Tower) in Westminster Palace is not mentioned in many English textbooks that are used in Russia. It also concerns, for example, new types of buildings that begin to appear in western countries and are becoming rather fashionable (tree houses, house boats).

The recent events of the year 2020 showed how radically the world we live in has changed. People in so many countries have found out that they are not ready to receive education only through distant IT channels. In fact, the teaching community definitely faced a challenge to educate using only digital technologies. Many scholars believed that the future belongs to these procedures and have reached a tipping point (Fenton, 2018). But is it really so? The issue seems to be rather controversial.

Conclusion

Nowadays the core vector of foreign language education all over the world is aimed at the students' ability to take part in the cross-cultural communication. Numerous studies in the field of lingua-didactics accept it as a necessity and require its implementation in contemporary foreign language textbooks. Thus formation of the socio-cultural competence is becoming one of the main issues in modern authors' courses for schoolchildren. The analysis based on the materials of "Dialogue with English" course shows how it can be effectively achieved developing the students' awareness of their self-identification through the intercultural

dialogue between Russia and English-speaking world. It goes without saying that constantly changing modern paradigm of education exhibits the necessity for production of new English language courses for secondary school where new realia should be reflected and explained.

References

Afanasyeva, O.V., Baranova, K.M., Miheeva, I.V. (2020). *UMK "Dialogue with English": Anglijskij yazyk. Uchebnik dlya 2 - 4 klassa v 2 chastyah* [Textbook Series "Dialogue with English: The English Language. Nexbook for 2-4 Forms. 2 Volumes]. BINOM: Laboratoriya znanij.

Baranova, K.M., Afanasyeva, O.V. (2020). Sociokul'turnyj komponent v obuchenii anglijskomu yazyku v nachal'noj shkole [Sociocultural component in primary school English language teaching]. *Inostrannye yazyki v shkole [Foreign Languages at School]*, 11, 61-65

Bichler, S., Albert, I., Barros, S. et al. (2020). Exploring Cultural Identity in a Multicultural Context—the Special Case of Luxembourg. *Human Arenas*, 3, 310–330. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-019-00090-w>

Bokova, T.N., Milovannova, L.A. (2019). Linguo-creative Thinking in the Context of Dialogue of Cultures in the Postmodern Era. *The European proceedings of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 95, 47-53. Retrieved from https://www.europeanproceedings.com/files/data/article/10043/12197/article_10043_12197_pdf_100.pdf

Briga, E. (2019). Intercultural Learning for Pupils and Teachers: A Good Practice Case Study from an Erasmus Project. In Kowalczyk-Walêdziak M., Korzeniecka-Bondar A., Danilewicz W., & Lauwers G. (Eds.), *Rethinking Teacher Education for the 21st Century: Trends, Challenges and New Directions*. (pp. 329-339). Opladen; Berlin; Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich. doi:10.2307/j.ctvpb3xhh.25

Chupryna, O.G. (2016). Formirovanie kul'turnoj identichnosti sredstvami rodnogo i inostrannogo yazykov. In *Dialog kul'tur, kul'tura dialoga: v poiskah peredovyh sociogumanitarnyh praktik. Materialy pervoj mezhdunarodnoj konferencii* (pp. 589–592). Moscow: YAzyki narodov mira.

Council of Europe. (2008). *Living together as equals in dignity. White paper on intercultural dialogue*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Euler, S. (2017). Utilizing the Project Method for Teaching Culture and Intercultural Competence. *Die Unterrichtspraxis / Teaching German*, 50(1), 67-78. doi:10.2307/90010332

Federal State Standard of Primary General Education (2010). Retrieved from <https://regulation.gov.ru/projects#npa=9453>

Fenton, W. (2018, January). The Best (LMS) Learning Management Systems. Retrieved from <https://www.pcmag.com/roundup/336308/the-best-lms-learning-management-systems>

Goncharova, V. A., Levina, O.M. (2020). Verbal Manipulation in the Context of Teaching Intercultural Foreign Language Communication. *The European proceedings of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 95, 176-183. Retrieved from https://www.europeanproceedings.com/files/data/article/10043/12210/article_10043_12210_pdf_100.pdf

Kesidou, A. (2019). Preparing Educators and Researchers for Multicultural/Intercultural Education: A Greek Perspective. In Veugelers W. (Ed.), *Education for Democratic Intercultural Citizenship*. (pp. 148-165). Leiden; Boston: Brill. doi:10.1163/j.ctvrk389.12

Korneeva, A.V. (2017). Communicative behavior and communicative consciousness as mechanisms of intercultural interaction. *NSU Vestnik. Series: Linguistics and Intercultural Communication*, 15 (4), 78-86.

Tareva, E. G. (2019). Culture within the Framework of Linguo-didactic Conceptology. *Vestnik Moskovskogo gorodskogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta. Seriya: Filosofskie nauki*, 2/1 (1), 123-127.

Tolosa, C., Biebricher, C., East, M., & Howard, J. (2018). Intercultural language teaching as a catalyst for teacher inquiry. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 70, 227-235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.11.027>

Windham, S. (2017). Culture First: Boosting Program Strength Through Cultural Instruction. *Die Unterrichtspraxis / Teaching German*, 50(1), 79-90. doi:10.2307/90010333.