

Multicultural Aspect of Using Animation Materials in a Classroom with a Foreign Language Audience

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Abstract. *Animated films used in teaching foreign languages are an informative visual aid that facilitates linguistic and cultural competence development. This paper presents procedures of introducing and methods of working with animated films in a foreign language classroom. Using the theory of precedence, the author analyzes the precedent phenomena in the Russian folk tales reflected in animation. Knowledge of the precedent phenomena (image names, situations, utterances) of one's own and other cultures, their comparison and comprehension in a flow of authentic speech is a precondition for non-native speakers' successful communication with representatives of other languages and cultures. Multicultural communication implies learning vocabulary, grammar and background cultural information of a foreign language and comparing them to those of a native language. The author highlights a necessity to develop new teaching resources in addition to the existing scenarios of working with videos, including with regard to the multicultural aspect.*

Key words – *Russian as a foreign language, animated materials, linguistic and cultural competence, multicultural aspect, precedent phenomena, edutainment.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, development of linguistic and cultural competence has become a key issue in teaching languages to non-native speakers: ability to interpret cultural meanings of words in addition to development of language skills, which facilitates development of communication skills in the multicultural aspect. Contemporary linguistic and cultural approach in teaching, first of all, emphasizes information about the culture of a studied language in semantics and structure of linguistic units of any level (for example, proverbs and sayings, onyms, idioms, precedent phenomena, speech etiquette) and explains intention of utterances.

Today, development of linguistic and cultural competence is one of the key objectives in training different specialists. Multicultural communication implies learning grammar and background cultural information of a language. Linguistic and cultural competence development will help non-native speakers overcome the language barrier and cultural divide.

Video is a highly informative universal aid in teaching foreign languages, especially with regard to the multicultural or linguistic and cultural competence. The aim of this research is to review procedures in using video in teaching Russian as a foreign language (RFL) in addition to the existing methods; review advance techniques in working with animated materials; describe characteristics of methods of using animated short films in a RFL classroom to boost motivation of learners and quality of teaching (use of

edutainment); study the major role of the linguistic and cultural aspect in learning background information necessary to understand specifics of animated films, mentality of speakers of the studied language and to understand the Russian vocabulary through understanding the Russian precedent phenomena used in animated films; analyze the precedent phenomena from the Russian folk tales used in animated films; describe the basics of multicultural communication, which lie in knowing and comparing the precedent phenomena of different cultures. The following methods are used for this research: descriptive and comparative analyses. In addition, I identify what needs to be done next: develop new teaching resources with examples of using animated materials for teaching Russian to non-native speakers at Northern (Arctic) Federal University, with elements of the North Russian culture in the multicultural aspect.

The practical relevance of this research lies in highlighting the complex use of linguistic and cultural approach to teaching RFL and development of new classroom materials since the materials used today do not normally reflect the multicultural aspect.

Russian animated films reflect the specifics of the Russian language, history and culture, develop listening skills, consolidate linguistic and cultural material, which sums up the history of the Russian nation development and stores and transmits cultural information. Video is easy to take in since the linguistic component is accompanied with the visual one, and visuals grab students' attention (use of edutainment) and facilitate learning new information. Video is a highly informative teaching aid in a foreign language classroom. Using videos as a supplement is relevant for all learners of Russian: both in class with a teacher and outside the linguistic environment.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

At present, resources for using video in teaching RFL are fairly scarce. The first such book of teaching resources – *The Russian world in Russian films* [1] – was published in 2007 at Moscow State University. Its authors – Moscow State University academics K. Baburina, N. Klyueva, M. Kulgavchuk, I. Kurlova, B. Mikitchenko, A. Petanova, O. Chubarova and A. Filippov – present some of their work with various types of videos, including animation [10]. The book by A. Epstein *Travelling to Prostokvashino: study guide for speaking skills development based on the animated film* is aimed at elementary learners of Russian [16]. The book includes lexical, grammatical and cultural materials,

exercises for developing listening, reading, speaking and translation skills.

Few specialists in teaching methods have publications on using animation in a RFL classroom (L. Boris [3], I. Kurlova [9], O. Diakonova [6], E. Rublyova [11], A. Safuanova [12], A. Soboleva [13]), and publications are scarce. At present, using animation for teaching Russian in the multicultural aspect is not even a topic for discussion at conferences.

I would like to summarize the ideas proposed by the specialists mentioned above. Animation materials for elementary learners are "an universal teaching aid that can be used to practice comprehensive listening and serves as a supplementary material in language learning" [13, p. 119]; "a film allows to immerse into real-life spoken language, to learn to understand real spoken Russian,... develops listening skills. Films help get acquainted with the Russian culture" [9, p.110]. "Working with animated films facilitates formation of cultural knowledge (moral values, stereotypical behavior) since animation reflects the real world" [11, p.59].

Procedures of introducing video in teaching are as follows: educational film for starters – educational film for elementary learners – working with animate films – working with a short-length film – working with a feature film" [9, p.110]. First RFL video materials: *Cups, Gun, Welcome*. In 2017, N. Bogoslavskaya, V. Chastnykh and Yu. Tyurina issued the learning package *To Moscow? To Moscow!* [2], which comprises six films and a textbook for working with videos in a RFL classroom. The textbook includes preliminary exercises and exercises to be done after watching the video, as well as cultural elements. Types of activities depend on the speed of delivery of speech: authentic or slowed down.

The materials mentioned above include methods for introducing animated films. The first method is as follows. For elementary learners of Russian, animated films are used as an easy way to introduce a new material, a universal teaching aid. Researchers believe that, in the first place, learners should be shown animated films with a simple story line, for example, *V. Suteev's tales* – a comic book and animated films based on that book [14]. Repeated situations and phrases help learners understand the text easily.

L. Boris suggests that elementary students first watch animated films with the volume off. When students understand the story line and guess the phrases of characters, a teacher has to make them perform voice-overs for the video. «When watching the film for the second time, students say their presumable lines, voice act the characters. Students learn to speak in sync with the characters» [3, p. 176]. Sometimes, when voice acting, students say much more than in the original text. We can talk about comprehension of a text if a student can summarize it in several sentences. It is necessary to train students to paraphrase, develop skills to find equivalents for words. Animated films are considered as texts, with background information, linguistic and cultural materials.

"The second method is part of edutainment (education + entertainment), when students focus on studies through entertainment" [6, p. 59]. Watching animated films always

cheers students up. Next, students watch animated films that are a bit more difficult to understand, for example, *The Snow Maiden*, which has numerous cultural elements that require explanation. It is most important for students to understand the story line and grasp the main idea of dialogs. Upon watching the film, students discuss what they understood, what they put down and can retell in their own words. Students should learn background information and cultural realia: the Russian traditions, customs, way of life, and compare them with those of their own. This way, animated films combine linguistic and cultural information, and lexical and grammatical material that helps students make progress in the Russian language.

The works by the researchers mentioned above describe methods of introducing animated films for learners of Russian in detail, and some works contain good pieces of video materials, including animated films, for analysis in a RFL classroom and exercises for students, and, in addition, they highlight the importance of cultural information for learners of Russian to ensure that they know the meanings and implications of Russian words, proverbs and sayings and compare them with those of their own language and culture. That is the essence of multicultural education. However, few materials reflecting this multicultural aspect of education are currently available, and specialists in teaching methods should focus on developing such materials. That is why any piece of work in this field, including my research, is important. New materials combining linguistic and cultural information in teaching a foreign language should constantly be developed in addition to the existing teaching resources for working with videos, and modern technology and teaching techniques will be of help. I have started developing my resources with the precedent phenomena in the Russian folk tales known to all Russians. However, regional precedent phenomena and situations are just as interesting. Northern (Arctic) Federal University hosts students from many different countries, who spend four years close to the Arctic. It is only natural that they are interested in the culture of people living in the Russian North, their worldview and survival in the North. That is why I am planning to develop teaching resources for RFL classes that will include description of the phenomena of North Russia, which I will speak about in the conclusion of this paper.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Following L. Boris, I. Kurlova, O. Diakonova, E. Rublyova and A. Safuanova, I continue developing methods of introducing authentic videos into activities for learners of Russian and use animated films based on the Russian folk tales.

For my linguistic and cultural analysis of Russian stereotypes, I use the theory of precedence developed by D. Gudkov, I. Zakharenko and V. Krasnykh, academics from Moscow State University.

When teaching a foreign language, it is vital to acquaint students with the culture of a country: «communication is impossible without knowledge of key elements of the national culture, which are crucial for native speakers» [5,

p. 8]. "The core of the cultural dimension is the national cognitive base, which is understood as a structured complex of knowledge and nationally marked and culturally determined images, indispensable for all representatives of a given linguistic and cultural community" [4, p. 11]. It is necessary to understand the system of linguistic and cultural meanings. Non-native speakers learn meanings of words and images of concepts and "start seeing the world through the prism of their native language with account for the concepts of their respective culture... In this case, words used for language-specific concepts "reflect" and, at the same time, "determine" the mentality of native speakers of a studied language" [15, p. 12]. Part of the cognitive base of every linguistic and cultural community is made up by the precedent phenomena, which help understand the mentality of a nation in general and avoid communicative failures. Theories of precedence have been developed by Yu. Karaulov, D. Gudkov, I. Zakharenko and V. Krasnykh. Yu. Karaulov characterizes precedent texts as "texts of a suprapersonal nature well known to people of the same environment, including at present and in the past" [7, p. 216]. The researcher believes that a precedent text can be a title of some book, or a character's name. "A precedent text is a finished product of verbal and cognitive activities; a predicative unit; a complex sign, the meaning of which is not equal to the sum of meanings of its components; a precedent text is well known to any typical representative of a linguistic and cultural community; a precedent text is used many times in communication through precedent utterances and precedent names" [8, p. 52]. Examples of precedent texts are the Russian folk tales, animated films based on tales, pieces of fiction included into school curriculum, titles of paintings and pieces of music. However, a text is too big a category, and mostly a syntactic one. Researchers D. Bagaeva, D. Gudkov, I. Zakharenko, V. Krasnykh believe that the term "text" is too broad and suggest their own term "precedent phenomenon" [8, p. 52]. The researchers specify that a precedent text is used in communication through "precedent phenomena". They further subdivide precedent phenomena into verbal (texts) and non-verbal (pieces of art, music, sculpture, architecture). Among the verbal precedent phenomena, the researchers distinguish precedent names of characters, precedent utterances, precedent situations. "A precedent name (PN) is a name which is connected with some widely known text (for example, Pechorin) or some precedent situation (for example, Ivan Susanin); it is a complex sign, which, when used in communication, appeals to a set of differential features of such precedent name of the language rather than to its denotation" [8, p. 52]. A precedent utterance (PU) is a quote from some text (for example, Who is to blame?). A precedent situation (PS) is "a benchmark", "ideal" situation connected with a number of connotations, differential features of which are part of the national cognitive base" [8, p. 52].

To acquaint non-native speakers with the meaning of Russian phenomena, it is necessary to use the dictionary *The Russian cultural dimension* [4] in class. The dictionary contains information about what "any representative of the Russian linguistic and cultural community really "knows" [4, pp. 9-10]. From the dictionary, foreigners can learn, for

example, that the precedent name Vasilisa the Wise/Beautiful is used to denote a protagonist of the Russian folk tales, a captive of Koschei, who gets freed by Ivan Tsarevich, and the dictionary also says that at present, Russians may call a very beautiful girl (woman) Vasilisa the Wise/Beautiful; in this case, she combines beauty with wisdom [4, pp. 180-181]. This information is necessary for foreigners for successful communication.

Now I would like to come back to the methods of my research. Taking into consideration the theory of D. Gudkov, I. Zakharenko and V. Krasnykh, I study and give examples of the precedent phenomena in this paper, which come from the folk tales and are used in animated films, and which are useful for teaching non-native speakers of Russian at intermediate level because they help understand the meaning of the Russian precedent names, utterances and situations. Thanks to the precedent phenomena, foreigners can get acquainted with the Russian mentality, history and system of values. That is how linguistic and cultural competence is developed.

I would like to tell about my observations and describe several precedent phenomena used in animated films; name stereotypes connected with the Russian folklore characters for non-native speakers of Russian. The following abbreviations are used: precedent name – PN – is a general stereotype of a certain image; precedent situation – PS – is a classic "benchmark" situation connected with a number of certain events and their connotations, relevant at present; precedent utterance – PU – is a quote, a catchphrase from an animated film, which captures the essence of a text in general.

For analysis of the precedent phenomena, I use materials from the Russian folk tales represented in animated films, which are introduced before watching films and analyzed after watching them in a RFL classroom.

The animated films are as follows:

Kolobok. PN Kolobok: infinity, bragging, boasting, recklessness, need for freedom, disobedience. PS: failure to assess a situation, failure to avoid danger; rebellion against parents. PU: "What is the meaning of the story? That is what happens to children who ran away from home". In fact, the story is a detective story: four assaults to murder and a homicide.

The Fox and the Hare. PN Fox: the rule of force, deceit, insincerity, treachery, ruthlessness, dishonesty; PN hare: vulnerability. PS: unlawful detention of someone's chattel; victory of an enemy, injustice. PU: "The fox had a house of ice, and the hare had a house of wood".

The Rooster and the Boyar. PN Rooster: selfless service, loyalty, fidelity; PN Old Man and Old Woman: kindness, helplessness, sincerity, poverty; PN Boyar: liar, thief. PS: serving one's master; triumph of justice – a dream of Russians.

The Magic Swan Geese. PN Swan geese: power; PN Alenushka: disobedience, overcoming difficulties through the love to brother, bravery, courage. PS: theft; disobedience/difficulty to set things right.

Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf. PN Little Red Riding Hood: innocence, failure to see danger, recklessness,

luckiness; PN wolf: the rule of force, deceit, treachery, criminality; PS: a girl should not go alone in the woods (a dangerous place for a girl), which is where predators and criminals hunt. Do not go into dangerous areas, beware.

The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish. PN Gold fish: extreme gratitude, generosity, respect towards elders; PN Old Woman: greed, insatiability, ingratitude, rudeness; PN broken trough: greed. PS: granting requests has its limits, punishment for greed. PU: "What do you want, Old Man?"

At the Pike's Behest. PN Pike: gratitude; PN Ivan: laziness and luckiness at the same time. PS: order; dreaming of advance in technology. PU: "At the pike's behest and at my request".

The Frog Princess. PN frog princess: spell, recklessness, dependency, luckiness, ability to survive, restitution; PN Ivan: kindness, loyalty, sacrificial love; PN brothers/sisters-in-law: envy of talent, beauty and uniqueness: "why not me (we)?" PS: overcoming difficulties, cooperation, restitution. PU: "Take me, Ivan, as your wife".

Sister Alenushka and brother Ivanushka. PN brother Ivanushka: disobedience, carelessness, recklessness, spinelessness, alcohol addiction; PN sister Alenushka: wisdom, will power, courage, defender of the family; PN witch: a symbol of human vices, in particular, alcohol addiction. PS: disobedience/difficulty to return to being oneself again. PU: "Do not drink, little brother, or you will become a calf".

Cinderella. PN Cinderella: idealism, innocence, kindness, love for one's neighbor, dependency, optimism. PS: reward for hard work and patience.

Firebird. PN firebird: an object of everyone's desires, success, luck, fortune, happiness, impermanence of control. PS: test/return of success and luck.

The Little Humpbacked Horse. PN Little Humpbacked Horse: selfless service, loyalty, assistance, being irreplaceable. PS: serving one's master.

Puss in Boots. PN Puss in boots: selfless service, loyalty, assistance, joviality. PS: serving one's master, resourcefulness.

The Tale of Tsar Saltan. PN Tsar Saltan: blind confidence, suggestibility, lack of a man's will, betrayal, stupidity; PN Queen: unhappy marriage, victim of envy and slander, loyalty to husband; PN Prince Gvidon: bogatyr, sovereign, savior, defender, sad knight, honor; PN Princess-swallow: beauty, femininity, loyalty and assistance to husband. PS: difficulties in travelling to another country, struggle for life, overcoming obstacles and salvage, family disruption and reunion; restitution.

The Sleeping Beauty. PN Beauty: blind confidence, inaction, failure to see mother-in-law's envy, unfair punishment. PS: triumph of justice in the end.

Go there – I do not know where, bring that – I do not know what. PN Tsar: malevolence, cruelty, tyranny, greed, insatiability; PN Ivan: dependency, responsibility, love and help of a smart and beautiful wife; serving the Motherland. PS: resourcefulness on service. PU: "Go there – I do not know where, bring that – I do not know what".

The most sacral and mysterious tale is *Ryaba the Hen*. PN hen Ryaba: unusualness, distinctiveness, value, inexhaustibility. PN old man and old woman: poverty,

helplessness, weakness. The plot is interesting: "One day Ryaba laid an egg. However hard the Old Man tried to break it – he could not. However hard the Old Woman tried to break it – she could not". The question is: Did they really want to break the egg? Most likely, not. The Mouse jumped out of the corner and touched the egg with her tail. The egg rolled, fell and broke into pieces. The Old Man and the Old Woman were so upset that they began to cry. "Don't cry, Old Man and Old Woman, said Ryaba. "I will lay you a new egg – ordinary, not golden". They cry, they are not happy to have golden eggs. And why does Ryaba try to comfort them in such a strange way? PN ordinary egg: a symbol of a child's life, whereas a golden egg is a symbol of richness, without a possibility to have children. PS: unexpected help. PU: "I will lay you a new egg – ordinary, not golden".

The most educational tale is *The Gigantic Turnip*. PN Mouse, Cat, Dog. Can you believe that a mouse could possibly help a cat, and a cat help a dog? PS: cooperation, truce.

The greatest tale about love is *The Scarlet Flower*. PN Nastenka – the youngest and, thus, the most pampered daughter, with impractical and badly thought-out wishes, behaves selfishly when she asks her father to bring her the Scarlet Flower from faraway lands. PN Beast: bewitched prince, but no one knows that. The Beast's distinctive human features: graciousness, sensitivity, attention, reliability, affection, tenderness, generosity. Nastenka is mesmerized with his personality and asks him to show his true self. He declines. However, she sees a reflection in the water and faints – so terrible is his appearance. And the Beast tells her to leave his place for she will not fall in love with him. But what will happen to the Beast in that case? He will die but he does not tell her that. That is the great sacrificial love: "Go away". But Nastenka fell in love with his soul. That is the most difficult thing to do – see somebody's soul. PS: sacrificial love. PU: "Go away, you will not fall in love with me".

The Twelve Months by the Russian poet S. Marshak, who wrote his book based on a folk tale. PN Stepdaughter: kindness, sacrifice, generosity, good behavior, meekness, open heartedness, loyalty to father and friends, strong will; PN Stepmother and Daughter: anger, greed, envy, betrayal, laziness, cruelty, brutality; PN Queen: malevolence, cruelty, stubbornness, boldness; PN 12 months: resourceful businessmen. PS: good defeats evil; a reward for being good. PS (according to Marshak): "antagonists do not die but get a chance to reform; the Queen is taught a valuable lesson" [12, p. 97].

To sum up, knowledge of the precedent phenomena is vital for non-native speaker for successful communication with people of other linguistic and cultural community.

IV. RESULTS

Animated materials are an informative visual aid in teaching foreign languages and facilitates development of linguistic and cultural competence. In this research, I used the works of L. Boris, I. Kurlova, O. Diakonova, E. Rublyova, A. Safuanova and A. Soboleva to describe the

procedure of introducing animated materials for learners of Russian in a RFL classroom and the key methods of working with animated films. Using the theory of precedence developed by D. Gudkov, I. Zakharenko and V. Krasnykh, I analyzed some precedent phenomena: precedent names, precedent situations and precedent utterances, which are used in the Russian tales and represented in animated films and which acquaint non-native speakers with stereotypes connected with the Russian folklore characters. Then, I highlighted the role of the linguistic and cultural approach in learning background information and described the basics of multicultural communication, which lie in knowing and comparing the precedent phenomena of one's own and other cultures. Thanks to the preliminary analysis and comparison of the precedent phenomena of different cultures (images, situations, utterances) in a RFL classroom, learners of Russian will have a better understanding of the Russian proverbs, sayings and metaphors in authentic speech, interpret their usage and related stereotypes in certain contexts and choose strategies for cooperation in a foreign language communication.

When learning the Russian phenomena, foreigners need to compare them to the phenomena of their own language, find differences and similarities between their culture and the Russian culture. The essence of multicultural communication lies in knowing and comparing the language and precedent phenomena of one's own and a foreign culture. In the process of such comparison, linguistic and cultural competence is developed, i.e. skills to use knowledge in real-life communication.

The tales usually raise the problem of good and evil, compare ways and actions of protagonists and antagonists, and describe the qualities of every character. At that, not only interpersonal relations are revealed but social ones as well. Every character has their own image, associations, stereotypes, which actualize through a metaphor or metonymy.

I described the method of developing linguistic, cultural and multicultural competence in teaching learners of Russian in a RFL classroom, developed my own materials for classes. I also highlighted the necessity to develop new teaching resources for working with videos in addition to the existing ones, including working in the multicultural context.

I am currently working on the teaching guide *Methods of introducing fragments of animated films in a RFL classroom (as exemplified by materials with realia of Northern Russia)*, in which I analyze the community of the North in the linguistic and cultural aspect and study the precedent phenomena in animated films related to the region under research. Of great interest are the precedent phenomena connected with the way of life, customs and traditions of the North, and the harsh Arctic environment, which are represented in the following animated films: *S. Pisakhov's Tales, Umka (Adventures of the White Bear), A Fire in the Yaranga, Silver Hoof, The Northern Tale, The Brave Fawn*, and the following animated films about the Urals: *The Mountain of Gems, The Origin of the Moon and The Ural mountains*. These animated films have not yet been analyzed

by researchers. My teaching guide will include the appendix *The Dictionary of the Cultural Dimension of Northern Russia*, with the regional precedent phenomena. Of great interest are animated films, without any text but with plenty of music and cultural information, directed by Rim Sharadgutdinov (Bashkortostanmultfilm Studio), which are dedicated to the pressing environmental problems: *Keep your Fingers Crossed, The Fir Trees, A Very Funny Animated Film*.

V. CONCLUSION

To sum up, it is important to develop linguistic and cultural competence in teaching a language to non-native speakers, i.e. develop language skills and skills to understand cultural meanings, and skills of communication in the multicultural context.

The language is a system of meanings, connotations and means of expression. The greatest pieces of literature, greater than the works by Pushkin and Dostoevsky, are the Russian folk tales. The tales reflect the history and culture of the Russian people. Historically, the Russian language is characterized by the axiological function – positive and negative assessments that reflect thinking about morals. The precedent names, key images from the tales symbolize certain personality types. The precedent names reflect the worldview of the nation. The tales reflect the mentality of the nation.

Animated films used in a RFL classroom help understand the Russian language and culture. Hence, it is crucial to develop new teaching resources, which will include methods of introducing linguistic and cultural information about the precedent phenomena of the Russian regions. In this research, I give several examples of the precedent phenomena from the Russian folklore. Learners of Russian have a positive reaction to working with Russian animated films. Edutainment boosts motivation for studying, which results in a better learning of the Russian language and culture.

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